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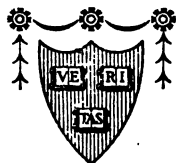
Lady Bountiful

A. W. Pinero



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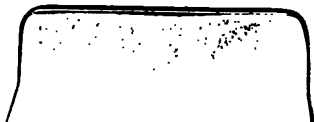


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LADY BOUNTIFUL

NEW PLAYS. 5s. each.

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LADY BOUNTIFUL

A STORY OF YEARS

A PLAY

In Four Acts

By ARTHUR W. PINERO

*"My masters, will you hear a simple tale?
No war, no lust, not a Commandment broke
By sir or madam—but a history
To make a rhyme to speed a young maid's hour."*

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

MDCCCXCI

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

WHEN Mr. Pinero set himself to write "Lady Bountiful" he evidently thought that a public which had patiently devoured Thackeray and Dickens in monthly numbers, which now was content to read even Mr. George Meredith in serial form, and made Mr. Mudie the guide to its literary taste, might be prepared to listen with interest to a story told in four acts which otherwise might have been narrated in three volumes. But the event proved that Mr. Pinero, in this instance, had not correctly gauged that unknown and very variable quantity, the British Public. It had been complained by the more captious of the newest critics that the stories of the plays written by even our best contemporary dramatists were such as no self-respecting novelist would condescend to handle. Be this as it may, the story of "Lady Bountiful" is, I venture to think, human and interesting enough to offer possibilities to the novelist; whereas Mr. Pinero treated it, after his lights, in dramatic form. And he gripped the attention of his audiences, and made them laugh and made them cry, and yet "Lady Bountiful" cannot be described as a popular success, in London at all events.

How is this comparative failure to be accounted for? I cannot think that the public was much concerned as to whether it was or was not a novel in stage form, but the

absence of any showy dramatic emotion may have exerted an adverse influence on the fortunes of the play. "Lady Bountiful" was produced at a moment when the palate of the playgoing public was being tickled by some very highly flavoured dramatic fare, and possibly, despite the gentle tyranny of "the young lady of fifteen," some resentment was felt that Mr. Pinero should have invited the great British Public to listen to "a history to make a rhyme to speed a young maid's hour." We are, of course, a very moral and respectable people; but we do not necessarily wish our virtues to be dragged into our amusements. We prefer to keep them separate; and when a dramatist deliberately seeks to entertain us with a play in which not a single Commandment shall be broken, we—speaking as the public—say, "How nice of him, and what a sweet and pure and wholesome play to take young girls to;" but, at the same time, we go, to see not his play, but something else, where, at least, the Seventh Commandment is not preserved in cotton-wool against fracture—and we send our girls to German Reed's.

But there were also other reasons for the non-success of "Lady Bountiful." People who seek amusement at the theatre do not really like to be made to cry. Actual pathos, which strikes home by its simple truth, is not endurable as long as it involves men and women of modern life. That pathetic scene in which Meg Heron dies quietly in her chair, while her husband, at her bidding, is talking to the baby in the cradle, was, I cannot help thinking, in a great measure accountable for the non-success of "Lady Bountiful." The audience was in tears in spite of itself, feeling the sadness of the episode with actual pain; and people came away from the theatre saying, "A beautiful play, but I

would not see it again for worlds ; it has made me so miserable." That lasting impression of sadness was the key-note to the fate of this play. Then, again, the respective characters of Camilla Brent and Dennis Heron appeared perplexing to many, and, being so, presented themselves in an unsympathetic light. The girl who endeavours to inspire the man she loves with ambition that shall impel him to perform a worthy part in life, who not unnaturally expresses her disappointment when she perceives no sign of the laudable ambition she had hoped to foster, was written down as "a priggish and inconsistent young woman." On the other hand, the young man who, in his sense of gratitude to the humble folk who have befriended him in his time of need, feels when he discovers that their daughter has fallen in love with him, that the fault must be his, and therefore his the reparation, at all costs to himself of happiness and worldly prospects, was solemnly written of as an egotistical young cub, and a quixotic fool to boot.

With a hero and heroine misunderstood like this by experienced playgoers, it is not surprising that the tone and significance of the whole play failed to appeal to the majority of the audiences. However, through the publication of the work, freed from the uncertainties of representation, the public is now brought into more direct communion with the author's intentions, and may therefore, perhaps, be able to regard the play in a more sympathetic light.

Mr. John Hare produced "Lady Bountiful" at the Garrick Theatre on March 7, 1891, and withdrew it on Friday, May 22, of the same year, after 66 performances. The following is a copy of the programme on the occasion of the first representation :—

THE GARRICK THEATRE.

LESSEE AND MANAGER, MR. JOHN HARE.

THIS EVENING, SATURDAY, MARCH 7th, 1891,

WILL BE ACTED

LADY BOUNTIFUL

A NEW AND ORIGINAL PLAY IN FOUR ACTS.

BY

A. W. PINERO.

SIR LUCIAN BRENT, BART.	Mr. GILBERT HARE. (His First Appearance in London.)
SIR RICHARD PHILLITER, Q.C.	Mr. C. W. SOMERSET.
RODERICK HERON	Mr. JOHN HARE.
DENNIS HERON	Mr. J. FORBES-ROBERTSON.
JOHN VEALE	Mr. CHARLES GROVES.
PEDGRIFT (a Parish Clerk and Sexton)	Mr. R. CATHCART.
WIMPLE	Mr. JOHN BYRON.
FLOYCE	Mr. R. POWER.
A VILLAGER	Mr. HENRY RIVERS.
<hr/>	
MISS BRENT	Miss CARLOTTA ADDISON.
CAMILLA BRENT	Miss KATE RORKE.
BEATRIX BRENT	Miss BEATRICE FERRAR.
MRS. VEALE	Miss DOLORES DRUMMOND.
MARGARET VEALE	Miss MARIE LINDEN
MRS. HODNUTT (a Pew Opener)	Miss CAROLINE ELTON.
AMELIA	Miss WEBSTER.
A VILLAGER	Miss E. TURTLE.

NOTE.—The Author desires to acknowledge the relationship of one of the characters of his play to the well-known family of the Skimpoles.

“My masters, will you hear a simple tale?
 No war, no lust, not a Commandment broke
 By sir or madam—but a history
 To make a rhyme to speed a young maid's hour.”

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

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ACT I.

AUNT ANNE SPEAKS HER MIND.

Peele-Lydgate. A Morning-room at "Fauncourt."

ACT II.

DENNIS SETS FOOT IN A NEW WORLD.

London. Three Months After.

"The Hyde Park Riding Academy," Trevor Row, Knightsbridge.

ACT III.

MARGARET PREPARES FOR HER VOYAGE.

London. Eighteen Months after.

The Basement, 9 Pinch Street, Westminster.

ACT IV.

CAMILLA GOES TO THE ALTAR.

Peele-Lydgate. Five Years after.

St. Eanswythe, Lydgate Old Church.

The Curtain will fall for a moment during Act IV., to represent the lapse of a night.

SCENERY BY MR. W. HARFORD.

On November 16, 1891, "Lady Bountiful" was produced simultaneously by Mr. Daniel Frohman at the Lyceum Theatre, New York, and by Mr. R. M. Field at the Boston Museum, but the fortunes of the play differed

very materially in the two great centres of American theatrical enterprise. In New York its success was far greater than had been anticipated, and it enjoyed quite a long career ; but in Boston the playgoing public turned an indifferent ear to it, in spite of the sympathy and praise of the critics, and it was withdrawn in a fortnight. The simplicity and gentleness of the story may have had something to do with this, as one writer pointed out, though in some quarters it was suggested that the play was not as happily cast in Boston as in New York. A curious fact in connection with the New York production was the changing of the hero's name from Dennis to Donald. Mr. Frohman did this because in that city, it appears, Dennis is used as the proverbial designation for a man who is always left behind, and therefore it was not considered auspicious for the hero of a new play. In Boston the name was not changed. Herein, perhaps, is matter for the curious collater of theatrical superstitions.

MALCOLM C. SALAMAN.

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

SIR LUCIAN BRENT, BART.

CAMILLA BRENT

BEATRIX BRENT

MISS BRENT

RODERICK HERON

DENNIS HERON

JOHN VEALE

MRS. VEALE

MARGARET VEALE

SIR RICHARD PHILLITER, Q.C.

AMELIA

WIMPLE

PEDGRIFT

MRS. HODNUTT

FLOYCE

NOTE.—The Author desires to acknowledge the relationship of one of the characters of his play to the well-known family of the Skimpoles.

THE FIRST ACT

AUNT ANNE SPEAKS HER MIND

THE SECOND ACT

DENNIS SETS FOOT IN A NEW WORLD

THE THIRD ACT

MARGARET PREPARES FOR HER VOYAGE

THE FOURTH ACT

CAMILLA GOES TO THE ALTAR

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1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses.

LADY BOUNTIFUL

THE FIRST ACT

AUNT ANNE SPEAKS HER MIND.

The scene is a luxuriously comfortable and elegant morning room at Fauncourt, the country seat of CAMILLA BRENT. Through the mullioned windows a beautiful garden is seen ; a little vestibule leads to the garden, while a further room is reached by a few oaken steps with balustrades. It is a bright morning in late summer.

BEATRIX BRENT, a healthy-looking, rosy-cheeked child of about thirteen, is standing by the window playing her violin ; SIR LUCIAN BRENT, her brother, a handsome young man of over twenty, passes outside smoking a pipe, and then enters through the vestibule, and lolls on the settle.

LUCIAN.

Good morning, Trix.

BEATRIX.

Good morning. You may not smoke here, you know. We ladies don't like it.

LUCIAN.

Oh! [*Returning his pipe to his case.*] Well, we gentlemen, especially when we're reading for "Smalls," don't like immature fiddling.

FLOYCE, *a manservant, enters with newspapers, which he places upon the table, except "The Times," which he hands to LUCIAN.*

FLOYCE.

The papers, Sir Lucian. [*FLOYCE goes out.*]

BEATRIX.

Aunt Anne would be very indignant if she knew you had answered me. [*Proudly.*] You know I am delicate.

LUCIAN.

No, I don't. I believe that's an impressive fiction, Trix. You always look sufficiently jolly.

BEATRIX.

As a matter of fact I am extremely delicate.

LUCIAN.

Then you shouldn't let it make you so vain.

BEATRIX.

[*Regarding LUCIAN with disgust.*] There ought to be no such relationship as brother and sister. Families should be all girls or all boys.

[*Approaching him, she scrapes the bass string of her violin in his ear.*]

LUCIAN.

Be quiet, Trix.

BEATRIX.

Come into the next room and play my accompaniment—there's a darling.

LUCIAN.

When I've read the paper.

BEATRIX.

Hateful boy! [*Looking out of the window.*] Halloo!
Oh-h-h!

[*MISS BRENT is passing the windows outside, with her head down and her hands clasped behind her.*]

LUCIAN

Eh?

BEATRIX.

Just look! [*In a whisper.*] Aunt Anne.

LUCIAN.

Anything wrong?

BEATRIX.

Whenever Aunt Anne stalks the garden in that way somebody is in for a scolding.

LUCIAN.

She was on the march before I was down.

BEATRIX.

Do you think Lady Bountiful has been spending too much money, or something of that sort?

LUCIAN.

Camilla is her own mistress. Aunt Anne is *my* guardian for a few months longer, but Lady Bountiful is over age.

BEATRIX.

Yes, but I know she still regulates Camilla's money matters.

LUCIAN.

[*Tapping something on the floor with his foot.*]
What's that?

BEATRIX.

[*Picking up a chatelaine.*] Aunt Anne has dropped her *chatelaine*. Lucian, aunt always scribbles her day's business on this tablet. Shall we peep?

LUCIAN.

I couldn't do such a thing. You're different.

BEATRIX.

If it's mean for you it's mean for me.

LUCIAN.

That doesn't follow. You're young and far from strong.

BEATRIX.

Hush!

[MISS BRENT *passes the windows again. As she walks away BEATRIX opens the tablet and holds it before LUCIAN's eyes.*

LUCIAN.

[*He reads it eagerly, then turns away with indignation.*] Oh, Beatrix!

BEATRIX.

Did you see anything?

LUCIAN.

How could I help it?

BEATRIX.

Tell Trixy.

LUCIAN.

"Sir Richard Philliter. Eleven-thirty."

BEATRIX.

Dear Sir Richard must be coming over from Baverstoke Park. I am glad! Anything else?

LUCIAN.

Yes. "John Veale. Twelve o'clock." That's all.

BEATRIX.

John Veale?

LUCIAN.

The horse-dealer at Baverstoke.

BEATRIX.

Oh, of course; the man who sells horses to Uncle Roderick and Dennis. [*Putting the chatelaine on the table.*] That hasn't told us much.

[*A man's voice singing a chansonette gaily to a piano is heard from the other room.*]

BEATRIX.

There's Uncle Roderick!

[She snatches up her violin and plays the tune he is singing. RODERICK HERON, a pleasant-looking little gentleman of about fifty, buoyant and effusive in manner, appears on the steps and finishes his song.]

RODERICK HERON.

[Shaking his finger at BEATRIX.] Ha, ha! Quite half a tone flat. My little fairy! Lucian, your reading prospers? *[He joins them.]*

LUCIAN.

Moderately well, uncle.

RODERICK HERON.

Grind, Lucian, grind. Youth is the seed-time, you know; it really is. Don't neglect it.

LUCIAN.

I hope I shall not.

RODERICK HERON.

Bravo! I recognise myself in you—I do indeed. I sometimes wish my own rascal of a son resembled me more, *[tapping his forehead]* resembled me here, you know.

LUCIAN.

Dennis is a rare fellow in the open air.

RODERICK HERON.

Ah, the dear vagabond! But gentlemen shouldn't be gipsies. However, if you do well, Lucian, I shall be consoled and you'll gain an invaluable friend in Roderick Heron—really an invaluable friend.

LUCIAN.

Thanks, uncle.

RODERICK HERON.

Beatrice, my dear, I dislike the tone of that fiddle of yours—I really do—it grates on me. I've heard of a treasure in London—in Wardour Street, in fact—a Geronimo Amati of 1608, a perfect beauty. I'm going to town to-day and I shall open my purse-strings.

BEATRICE.

Oh, uncle! [*Kneeling beside him.*] Oh, uncle, what is it like to be as rich as you are and to be able to do just as you please?

RODERICK HERON.

Ha, ha! it is exceedingly pleasant! I own it—it's pleasant! Especially when a man has an idle villain like dear Dennis, and a nephew and niece, all hungering for sugar-plums.

BEATRICE.

[*Throwing her arms round him.*] Dear Uncle Roderick!

[*They all laugh cheerily.* MISS BRENT, a tall, stately woman of fifty-five, with silvery hair, and a sweet face and voice, enters through the vestibule.

RODERICK HERON.

Ahem! my pets, here is Aunt Anne.

MISS BRENT.

I've lost my *châtelaine*, children.

LUCIAN.

It's on the writing-table, aunt.

MISS BRENT.

[*Attaching the chatelaine to her belt.*] Ah, yes.

BEATRIX.

[*Quietly to LUCIAN.*] Looks solemn, doesn't she ?

LUCIAN.

Jolly solemn.

[*LUCIAN and BEATRIX steal up to the window and sit there, looking out.*]

RODERICK HERON.

You—ah—received my little note last night, dear Anne ?

MISS BRENT.

Yes.

RODERICK HERON.

All right, eh ?

MISS BRENT.

Mr. Heron, you know your allowance is not due till Michaelmas.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Glancing quickly towards LUCIAN and BEATRIX.*]
Sssh ! the young people. Know it ! My career is saddened by the necessity for counting the hours between one quarter-day and another.

MISS BRENT.

Very well. Then, I tell you plainly, I shall advise Camilla not to give you a single penny beyond that fixed and liberal allowance.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Thrusting his hands into his pockets and walking away reflectively.*] Really, you know, damn! [MISS BRENT takes up her knitting.] I paid you a great compliment by confiding my little trouble to you. I ought to have gone direct to my dear niece.

MISS BRENT.

A compliment? It is my impression that you knew Camilla would consult me.

RODERICK HERON.

Don't be spiteful, Anne; it's unbecoming—it really is. [*Coaxingly.*] Anne dear, upon my soul I couldn't change you a florin at this moment. I'm as low as that, you know, really.

MISS BRENT.

I believe you. And yet you tell me that John Veale, the Baverstoke horse-dealer, sends you his half-yearly account for four hundred and forty guineas.

RODERICK HERON.

Enormous, I admit—colossal. But look at the result—my son and I are the two best mounted men in the county.

MISS BRENT.

It's infamous! How dare you buy such horses and depend upon Camilla's paying for them?

RODERICK HERON.

Confound it, Anne, dear Dennis and I must be kept in health. Men must ride, you know. The poor share one privilege with the rich—that of having livers. And I'm sure Camilla wouldn't like to see her relatives on indifferent cattle.

MISS BRENT.

Poor Camilla! [*Laying her work aside.*] Poor, wilful, capricious, large-hearted Camilla! The folks have named her Lady Bountiful for her liberality; they should call her Lady Folly for her pains. For shame, Mr. Heron!

RODERICK HERON.

For shame! I like that! It's *I* who deserve pity, with a boy like dear Dennis to provide for—by the sweat of my brow, as it were.

MISS BRENT.

If you were a good man you'd tell Dennis the truth.

RODERICK HERON.

I always tell the truth. Really Anne, you're—you're libellous, you know.

MISS BRENT.

I mean, you would not keep him in the dark any longer. Let him know that his father is utterly without means, that both of you are the pensioners of a girl.

RODERICK HERON.

This is too bad, Anne. Recollect, please, I have Camilla's assent that not a soul shall know my unhappy position. Tell one, tell all. You would rob me of my sole remaining consolation—the respect which people entertain for a well-to-do person.

MISS BRENT.

Grant me patience !

RODERICK HERON.

Well, well, I really can't sympathise with your narrow views of family obligations. You always were a jarring note, Anne ; I am sorry to appear impolite, but you are a jarring note. [*He collects all the newspapers in the room, and tucks them under his arm.*] I'll glance through the papers in my room—the papers, you know. Send my niece to me the very moment she comes in ; I'll not trouble you further in this little matter.

MISS BRENT.

[*Clenching her hands.*] Oh !

RODERICK HERON.

[*As he is going.*] I go to town by the one-fifteen. May I buy you any little thing, Anne ?

MISS BRENT.

Oh, no, no !

RODERICK HERON.

I shall open my purse-strings. Good for evil, dear Anne, good for evil !

[*He goes out, cheerfully.*]

MISS BRENT.

Oh, this man! And, oh, poor, foolish, blind Lady Bountiful!

CAMILLA BRENT, *a sweet, graceful girl of two-and-twenty, enters quickly, and looks round the room in agitation.*

CAMILLA.

Lucian! Lucian! [*Going to MISS BRENT and clinging to her.*] Ah, aunty!

[*LUCIAN and BEATRIX approach her.*]

MISS BRENT.

You are trembling, child.

CAMILLA.

Dennis took me to the paddock to show me the two hunters Uncle Roderick bought from Veale of Baverstoke, and he is trying them at the six-barred gate. The mare clears it cleverly, but the black horse "Strephon" has refused it again and again, and I know it will end in harm to Dennis. Stop him, Lucian! [*Stamping her foot.*] Lucian!

LUCIAN.

Stop him! Dennis has never let a horse master him yet.

CAMILLA.

But it is dangerous. I—I can't bear it.

[*She drops into a chair, hiding her face in MISS BRENT's skirts.*]

MISS BRENT.

Go, Lucian. [LUCIAN runs out.] My salts, Beatrix. [BEATRIX goes out.]

LUCIAN.

[Outside.] Camilla, here's Dennis! [Calling.] Dennis!

DENNIS HERON, *a handsome young man with a bronzed face, an athletic frame, and an air of good-humoured indolence, saunters on; he is in riding dress.*

DENNIS.

Who said that black devil wouldn't clear the bar?

CAMILLA.

[Looking at him for a minute with eager gladness, then, recovering her self-possession, and drawing herself up.] Who said so? I did not.

DENNIS.

Oh, why, Camilla, you——!

LUCIAN re-enters. MISS BRENT retires to the window-seat.

LUCIAN.

Did you get over, Dennis?

DENNIS.

Clean. "Strephon" didn't know me—he does now.

CAMILLA.

Are you such a very formidable person when one knows you, may I ask?

DENNIS.

Ask "Strephon." [CAMILLA laughs lightly.] Eh

CAMILLA.

This display of horsemanship appears to have occurred after a certain credible witness left the scene.

DENNIS.

Why, you saw——!

CAMILLA.

I only saw an obstinate horse canter up to a gate and shake his head at it with an angry snort. [BEATRIX enters with a vinaigrette which she hands to CAMILLA; who hastily slips it into her pocket.] The exhibition became monotonous and I withdrew.

DENNIS.

Oh, I say, that's too bad! Here, you youngsters, come into the paddock and watch me take that black horse over the old six-bar!

CAMILLA.

No, no—Dennis!

BEATRIX.

Oh, yes, we'll come.

DENNIS.

Camilla says I'm bragging.

CAMILLA

How can you be such a child!

DENNIS.

Ah, but you did. Come along, Lucian. Two credible witnesses!

[DENNIS, BEATRIX, and LUCIAN go out.
CAMILLA is following them.]

MISS BRENT.

Camilla.

CAMILLA.

Yes, aunty?

MISS BRENT.

Stop here, dear. I want to speak to you. [CAMILLA sits looking anxiously out of the window.] Mr. Heron has written me a note to tell me he is in debt again and wants more money.

CAMILLA.

Well, if Mr. Heron wants more money, Mr. Heron must have it, I suppose.

MISS BRENT.

And how long is this state of things to continue?

CAMILLA.

Oh, aunty, let us be happy while we may.

MISS BRENT.

So say I, dear.

CAMILLA.

Uncle Roderick was poor mother's only brother, her favourite.

MISS BRENT.

Ah!

CAMILLA.

And what my mother loved, I must love.

MISS BRENT.

Your mother did more than her duty—left him a small fortune.

CAMILLA.

Which dribbled away, "positively dribbled, you know," Uncle Roderick says.

MISS BRENT.

And afterwards, for your dead mother's sake, your father again provided for him.

CAMILLA.

That trickled, uncle says—"absolutely trickled, you know, really." Ha, ha! Poor Uncle Roderick!

MISS BRENT.

And then a self-willed, thoughtless girl, who is unhappily her own mistress, assumed obligations which her parents had already sufficiently discharged. That's you, Camilla.

CAMILLA.

That is I. Camilla the Heedless—Camilla the Spendthrift—Camilla the Wilfully-wealthy! And that's just it, Aunt Anne—I'm rich. And while I'm rich the dear pauper whose blood I carry in my veins must morally break his pile of stones, and pick his little heap of oakum, in the shelter of my home. The improvident rich must nourish the improvident poor.

MISS BRENT.

[*Earnestly.*] Yes, Camilla, but what of the improvident poor's able-bodied son? [CAMILLA *glances away in confusion.*] Come here, girlie.

[CAMILLA *kneels beside* MISS BRENT.]

CAMILLA.

Don't scold me—never scold me, dear aunt.

MISS BRENT.

I am afraid you care for him, child.

CAMILLA.

[*Laying her head upon MISS BRENT'S bosom.*] Oh!

MISS BRENT.

Oh, dear! oh, dear! [CAMILLA *laughs softly.*] Ah, don't laugh!

CAMILLA.

Let me while I can. It is not every girl who can smile over an unrequited passion.

MISS BRENT.

Unrequited fiddlesticks!

CAMILLA.

No—unrequited passion. Why, Aunt Anne Dennis thinks much less of me than of "Strephon," the ugly black brute who wanted to pitch him over the gate.

MISS BRENT.

But if one day he transferred his affections from his horse "Strephon" to his cousin Camilla?

CAMILLA.

Hush! then I should shake my head at him, because, aunt——

MISS BRENT.

Because?

CAMILLA.

Because I could not marry poor Dennis.

MISS BRENT.

Ah ! tell me why.

CAMILLA.

I am so—disappointed.

MISS BRENT.

Come, come, here's sense in the house at last !

CAMILLA.

He is idle ; without an anxious thought, and I fear with little pride ; with no occupation but to loiter in the stable-yard, no pleasure but in a gallop across country. And that is not my ideal of a husband.

MISS BRENT.

Why, Camilla, that's well spoken !

CAMILLA.

[*Turning, impetuously.*] Ah, don't triumph at it !

MISS BRENT.

[*Taking CAMILLA in her arms.*] Triumph, my dear !

CAMILLA.

For, oh, I have so longed for something different from this.

MISS BRENT.

Different ?

CAMILLA.

Aunty, I—I have believed in Dennis. I have watched for a sign of an honest, worthy ambition, and there has been nothing but indolence and indifference. I have hoped to see him go into the world and do good because he felt himself a man, and not because he found himself a beggar. And now I see my mistake, and I—I am disappointed.

[*RODERICK enters briskly with the newspaper.*

RODERICK HERON.

My dear Anne—ah, here is my Camilla. Good morning, darling.

MISS BRENT.

[*Quietly to CAMILLA as she goes to Roderick.*] Be firm with him! I can do nothing.

[*She sits at the table, writing*

RODERICK HERON.

How sweet you look! Er—your aunt has mentioned——?

CAMILLA

Yes, uncle.

RODERICK HERON.

That's right. I am in great trouble, my dear—really in overwhelming trouble.

CAMILLA.

I am very sorry.

RODERICK HERON.

I knew you would be—you're so charmingly sympathetic. I'm sympathetic myself, you know.

CAMILLA.

Aunt tells me you are in debt again, Uncle Roderick.

RODERICK HERON.

I am bound to say that conveys a fair idea of my position.

CAMILLA.

[*With a glance at MISS BRENT.*] I—I am a little vexed with you.

RODERICK HERON.

My pet, I want you to be vexed with me, you know. There is nothing I desire more than that you should say to me—sternly if you will—“There, Uncle Roderick, there is the paltry cheque you ask for, and, mind, not another penny till your next quarter’s allowance.” I want you to say this to me [*referring to his watch*], almost directly, in fact.

CAMILLA.

[*Bending over MISS BRENT’s shoulder.*] What am I to do, aunty?

MISS BRENT.

Anything that’s foolish. I am angry with you.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Slipping his arm through CAMILLA’s.*] Poor Anne—a bitter disposition. Quite as constant a church-goer as myself, but Heavens, what a disposition! Come into another room, and I’ll tot up the few little items which are pressing upon me—depriving me of rest, you know.

BEATRIX.

[*Running past the windows outside.*] Here is Sir Richard!

LUCIAN.

[*Looking through the open window.*] Sir Richard is here, aunt.

[*He runs after BEATRIX.*]

MISS BRENT.

[*Looking at her watch.*] A boy-lover could not be more punctual. Heaven prosper him!

CAMILLA.

[*To Roderick Heron.*] Aunt is cross with me.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Quietly to her.*] Never mind. I'll bring you some pretty little object from Paris. Very likely I shall open my purse-strings there, you know.

CAMILLA.

[*Coaxingly to Miss Brent.*] Be friends with me, dear.

MISS BRENT.

Ah! Lady Bountiful, I'll forgive you everything, if you do one womanly, sensible act to-day.

CAMILLA.

What is that?

MISS BRENT.

Come back to me here, and you shall know.

CAMILLA.

Of course I will. But don't forget, I must see dear Sir Richard.

MISS BRENT.

[*Kissing Camilla.*] Yes, you must see Sir Richard.

CAMILLA.

Now, Uncle Roderick! I am going to scold you terribly.

RODERICK HERON.

I desire it, my pet. I desire it, you know, really.

[RODERICK HERON and CAMILLA withdraw.
LUCIAN and BEATRIX pass the windows
with SIR RICHARD PHILLITER, then enter
the room. PHILLITER is a genial man
of fifty, with a manner that is suave and
precise. He is clean-shaven and bald, with
a fringe of almost white hair. His dress is
that of a country gentleman, but a little
old-fashioned.]

SIR RICHARD.

[*Shaking hands with* MISS BRENT.] I am here.

MISS BRENT.

[*To* SIR RICHARD.] You have walked over from
Baverstoke ?

SIR RICHARD.

Every yard.

[BEATRIX goes to SIR RICHARD and hugs his
arm closely.]

SIR RICHARD.

And how's my little woman ?

BEATRIX.

Only pretty well, thank you. Perhaps you haven't
heard in London that I'm extremely delicate.

LUCIAN.

[*Derisively.*] Ho, ho !

BEATRIX.

Aunt, pray speak to Lucian.

MISS BRENT.

Children, I'm very selfish, and I want to talk to Sir Richard alone.

BEATRIX.

[*Gloomily.*] Oh !

MISS BRENT.

Lucian, amuse Trix for half an hour.

LUCIAN.

Oh, when I'm reading so jolly hard !

BEATRIX.

Hear me play my violin before you go : I astonish everybody.

SIR RICHARD.

My dear, if all goes well with me here, I'll stay to luncheon.

BEATRIX.

If all goes well ! If all *what* goes well ?

[*LUCIAN is going up the steps.*]

SIR RICHARD.

Um ! Ask Camilla at tea-time : perhaps she will tell you.

BEATRIX.

[*Taking her violin and going up the steps.*] Lucian, always let the lady precede you.

[*She passes LUCIAN, and he follows her out.*]

MISS BRENT.

Oh, Sir Richard, I am so anxious !

SIR RICHARD.

Anxious !

MISS BRENT.

And you also, I know.

SIR RICHARD.

Yes. My philosophy entirely abandoned me last night and I enjoyed very imperfect rest. "*Ut melius, quidquid erit, pati !*"—but even Horace fails to soothe me.

MISS BRENT.

I dare say.

SIR RICHARD.

Camilla has no inkling of the object of my visit ?

MISS BRENT.

Not the slightest.

SIR RICHARD.

No, no. Then, of course, you have nothing encouraging to tell me ?

MISS BRENT.

Well—yes, I have.

SIR RICHARD.

My dear Miss Brent !

MISS BRENT.

Some obstacle which I feared might prove formidable has shrunk almost to nothing.

SIR RICHARD.

Bless me ! [*Wiping his brow with a silk handkerchief.*]
Ah ! May I ask if the obstacle was my junior ?

MISS BRENT.

Now, come, come. If we were not acquaintances of twenty years' standing, I could readily believe you to be a man of five-and-thirty.

SIR RICHARD.

Then, ma'am, I have never before estimated your perception so lightly.

CAMILLA.

[*Heard outside.*] Sir Richard !

SIR RICHARD.

[*Nervously.*] Ah !

MISS BRENT.

Bless you, dear friend !

[*She goes out quickly as CAMILLA enters.*]

CAMILLA.

[*Running to PHILLITER with outstretched hands.*]
They have left you alone ?

SIR RICHARD.

How are you, my dear ?

CAMILLA.

Glad, glad to see you. [*She offers her cheek to him for his kiss, but finding he does not respond she draws back, wonderingly, and sees he has turned away from her.*] What is the matter ?

SIR RICHARD.

The matter ! Sit down, Camilla. [*She sits, with a perplexed look, and he sits facing her.*] My dear, I have been thinking much—as one who had the confidence of your parents is, perhaps, privileged to do—of the changes which are likely to befall you.

CAMILLA.

Changes ?

SIR RICHARD.

Lucian comes of age shortly.

CAMILLA.

Oh, yes.

SIR RICHARD.

And it is settled that he will reside on his own property, at the Grange.

CAMILLA.

We go to the Grange with Lucian, Sir Richard.

SIR RICHARD.

But he will marry.

CAMILLA.

Marry !

SIR RICHARD.

My dear, everybody marries.

CAMILLA.

Not everybody. Aunt Anne doesn't marry, *you* do not m——

SIR RICHARD.

One moment, one moment. Assuming that Lucian marries, such an event will involve your returning to Fauncourt—to all intents and purposes a lonely woman.

CAMILLA.

I am too well and happy ever to be lonely.

SIR RICHARD.

My dear, loneliness to your sex is what gout is to mine. But a woman has this advantage over a man—she can share her loneliness with another, while he cannot share his gout. Camilla, walking here from Baverstoke I refreshed my memory from this little volume [*producing a small book from his pocket and opening it at a turned leaf*], a companion of my college days.

CAMILLA.

What is it?

SIR RICHARD.

The Odes of Horace. I marked a passage. Look, dear.

[*He bends towards her, handing her the book.*]

CAMILLA.

I see it.

SIR RICHARD.

Tell me if I know my lesson.

“Desine, dulcium

“Mater sæva Cupidinum——.” [at a loss] Um!

CAMILLA.

“Circa ——”

SIR RICHARD.

“Circa lustra decem flectere mollibus

“Jam durum imperiis——”

CAMILLA.

What does it mean?

SIR RICHARD.

Camilla, it is a cry of entreaty from a man of fifty to the Mother of Love, beseeching her to pity him and pass him by. My dear—I am fifty.

CAMILLA.

[*In a whisper.*] Sir Richard!

SIR RICHARD.

Perhaps, with Horace, I should send up another such a prayer. But, no—I come to you, an earthly goddess, to ask you not only to pity but to reward me.

CAMILLA.

I?

SIR RICHARD.

Camilla, if you could find it in your heart to return the affection I bear you, you would crown my life with a blessing greater, I think, than can ever have been bestowed upon man. [*She moves away and sits in amazement.*] Think, my dear, pray think.

[*He walks away from her to conceal his agitation, she drops the Horace, and cries.*]

CAMILLA.

Did Aunt Anne—know you were—to speak to me?

SIR RICHARD.

Yes—yes.

CAMILLA.

Ah, she should have spared us both.

SIR RICHARD.

[*In a low voice.*] It cannot be, then? [*She slowly shakes her head. Then goes to the further window, where she stands with her back towards him and her head bowed.*] Ah! [*From the other room there come the sounds of a violin and a piano playing a tender melody. SIR RICHARD takes up his hat and stick.*] Is that Beatrix?

CAMILLA.

[*Turning.*] Yes.

SIR RICHARD.

I half promised the little woman to listen to her playing, but—I find I must be getting home. Will you make my excuses?

CAMILLA.

Yes.

SIR RICHARD.

[*To himself.*] Nero fiddled at the destruction of Rome—Beatrix is my Nero. [*Going to CAMILLA and gently touching her hand.*] We shall meet again soon, my child—very soon.

[*She gives him a quick, grateful look; he nods to her smilingly. Then as he is going out, he meets DENNIS coming in. At the same moment MISS BRENT walks slowly past the window.*

DENNIS.

How are you, Sir Richard?

SIR RICHARD.

Ah, Dennis, how are you? Just as I am running away! Don't stir! Good-bye—good-bye!

DENNIS.

Good-bye!

[SIR RICHARD goes out, and meets MISS BRENT, and they are seen to pass the windows and disappear together.]

DENNIS.

[Picks up the book and glances at the title-page.]
Stupid old Horace! Halloo, Sir Richard left his book!

[He is about to call after SIR RICHARD, when CAMILLA takes the book from him quickly.]

CAMILLA.

No, no—I want to keep that.

DENNIS.

Why, you've been crying!

CAMILLA.

Indeed, I—I—I am going to my room.

[She goes towards the door and he follows her.]

DENNIS.

I hate to see you bothered about anything.

CAMILLA.

Excuse me, Dennis.

DENNIS.

Look here—Beatrix let out about you.

CAMILLA.

What do you mean?

DENNIS.

You were scared at my tussle with “Strephon.”

CAMILLA.

Beatrix is becoming a very troublesome child.

DENNIS.

Don't blame her. Besides, I—I like you to want me not to come to grief.

CAMILLA.

Poor, unhappy Dennis!

DENNIS.

Why do you call me that?

CAMILLA.

Aren't very conceited people unhappy? I think I will go out.

DENNIS.

I'll come with you.

CAMILLA.

[*Putting on her hat.*] No, thank you.

DENNIS.

I've nothing to do, you know

CAMILLA.

[*Contemptuously.*] Oh, I know. But I'm going to talk to some of my old people.

DENNIS.

That'll do for me—awful fun.

CAMILLA.

[*Eyeing him disdainfully.*] Fun!

[*She is nervously trying to adjust the veil of her hat.*]

DENNIS.

Here! I can do that; that's what I *can* do.

[*He assists her; she stamps her foot.*]

CAMILLA.

You are not to walk with me, I tell you.

DENNIS.

I am though. [*Surveying her hat.*] Jolly!

[*She takes off her hat and throws it upon the table.*]

CAMILLA.

[*Sitting down.*] I do not go out before luncheon.

DENNIS.

Eh?

CAMILLA.

[*Emphatically.*] I do not go out before luncheon.

DENNIS.

Camilla, what has come between you and me? I can't make it out. We are—cousins.

CAMILLA.

Really?

DENNIS.

Nowadays, I don't know when you'll be pleased or when you'll be cross with me; sometimes it's a smile and a black look at the same moment. I can't make it all out; because we—we're cousins.

CAMILLA.

If our disagreements are painful, let us avoid each other. Why do you stay here just now, for instance?

DENNIS.

[*Sitting on the other side of the table*]. Because I do not go out before luncheon.

CAMILLA.

[*Laughing helplessly*]. Ha, ha! [*Half tearfully*]. What a simple fellow you are, Dennis!

DENNIS.

Ha, ha, ha! that's like yourself. I don't mind being chaffed—go on. I say, we haven't played chess for centuries.

[*He goes to the table and fetches chessboard and chessmen.*]

CAMILLA.

I don't care for chess any longer.

DENNIS.

Oh, yes, you do. You're awfully keen on chess.

[*She turns her back, but, not disconcerted, he sits facing her, placing the board upon their knees.*]

CAMILLA.

If I must be wearied with chess, we'll go back to the table, please.

DENNIS.

No, no—it's jollier nursing it.

[They arrange the chessmen ; she quickly, he deliberately.]

CAMILLA.

We'll not play like old gentlemen—a move a month.

DENNIS.

Heaps of time.

CAMILLA.

Oh !

DENNIS.

Neither of us goes out before luncheon. Ha, ha !

CAMILLA.

You ride your joke as you do your horse, till it is subdued. *[Moving a chessman.]* There !

[They play, both holding their heads down.]

DENNIS.

[Quietly.] Cam. *[She does not answer.]* Cam, you're not really turning against me, are you ?

CAMILLA.

Of what consequence is it ?

DENNIS.

I don't believe I can get along if you turn against me.

CAMILLA.

I've heard of nothing which you make it necessary to get along with.

DENNIS.

I'm an idler, you mean ?

CAMILLA.

[*Watching the board intently.*] You to move, Dennis.

DENNIS.

Yes, you're always telling me that, and, do you know, Cam, I've been thinking lately——

CAMILLA.

Thinking !

DENNIS.

Well, when there's no hunting a man must think. I've been thinking that it might be better for me if I were ridden with spurs——

CAMILLA.

Spurs ?

DENNIS.

If I had firm hands over me ; some one who would ride me out for the little I'm worth, to the end ; if I had—a friend.

CAMILLA.

Idle people cultivate one branch of industry assiduously—the manufacture of excuses. You *have* friends.

DENNIS.

Have I ? [*Looking at CAMILLA wistfully.*] You ?

CAMILLA.

I—I am very well disposed towards you.

DENNIS.

Yes. [*Leaning towards her.*] But somehow I've hoped lately—I've hoped——

CAMILLA.

[*Shrinking from him.*] Oh!

DENNIS.

I've hoped you might grow to think of me—differently from that way.

[*There is a moment of irresolution on her part. Then, with a quick shake of the head, she sweeps the chessboard to the ground and starts up. He rises with her.*]

CAMILLA.

Dennis!

DENNIS.

Cam!

CAMILLA.

You've no right to speak to me like this!

DENNIS.

No right? Why, a man doesn't love by right.

CAMILLA.

A man *should* love by right; by the right of some achievement which deserves reward, or some failure which earns consolation. But *you*!

DENNIS.

I know what you mean. Idle at school; in the wrong set at college; and now, if I started in the race a boy could head me.

CAMILLA.

[*To herself.*] Ah!

DENNIS.

And so I beg your pardon for dreaming you could stoop to pick a weed from the bricks of your stable-yard.

[*He turns away, she follows him a step or two.*]

CAMILLA.

Dennis, it isn't great men women love dearest, or even fortunate men; often, I tell you, their deepest love goes out to those who labour and fail. But for those who make no effort, who are neither great nor little, who are the nothings of the world——

DENNIS.

Who are the Dennis Herons of the world!

CAMILLA.

For those, a true woman has only one feeling—anger and contempt!

DENNIS.

[*As if struck by a blow.*] Contempt! [*She pauses, startled, seeing a strange look on his face.*] Contempt!

CAMILLA.

Dennis! I am sorry. The wretched word spoke itself. Dennis! [*He is silent, staring before him.*] Speak to me.

DENNIS.

[*In a stifled voice.*] Contempt!

[*His head drops upon his breast; she looks at him appealingly, then waits for him to speak, but he remains silent, never moving. She goes out quietly. FLOYCE enters.*]

FLOYCE.

I beg your pardon, Mr. Dennis—Mr. Veale of Baverstoke.

DENNIS.

To see me ?

FLOYCE.

An appointment with Miss Brent, I believe, sir.

DENNIS.

You'd better bring him in here.

FLOYCE.

He's with his—family, to all appearances, sir.

DENNIS.

Find Miss Brent.

[FLOYCE goes out.

FLOYCE.

[Outside.] This way, please.

[FLOYCE shows in JOHN VEALE, a good-looking, hearty, "horsey" man of fifty, well dressed, according to the fashion of his class; MRS. VEALE, a portly, well-preserved woman of three-and-forty, attired in her "best"; and MARGARET, a handsome, commonplace girl of twenty, dressed like her mother, a little too smartly. FLOYCE goes out.

VEALE.

[Shaking hands with DENNIS heartily.] How d'ye do, Mr. 'Eron, how d'ye do? Surprised to see Mrs. Veale and Margaret at Fauncourt, I dessay ?

DENNIS.

[Shaking hands with MRS. VEALE.] How are you, Mrs. Veale ?

MRS. VEALE.

Nicely, thank you.

DENNIS.

[*Shaking hands with* MARGARET.] And you, Meg?

MARGARET.

Thanks, Mr. Dennis.

VEALE.

[*To* MRS. VEALE.] Mother.

[*MRS. VEALE takes his hat from him, unbuttons his coat, unwinds his muffler, and removes his gloves. The muffler and gloves she deposits in the hat, which never leaves her.*

VEALE.

Thank ye, mother.

DENNIS.

Sit down, Mrs. Veale.

MRS. VEALE.

Much obliged, I'm sure.

[*She sits with some importance, nursing JOHN'S hat. MARGARET sits watching*
DENNIS.

VEALE.

The fact is, Mr. 'Eron, I had a telegram last night from Miss Brent askin' me to come over this morning without fail. Nothing amiss in the stables, I 'ope?

DENNIS.

Not that I'm aware of.

VEALE.

No. Well, sir. [*Looking under his chair and on the table.* To MRS. VEALE.] Have you got my 'at, 'Etty?

MRS. VEALE.

Yes, John.

VEALE.

Thank ye. Well, it put me in a bit of a fix, you see, for we're all packing off to town to-day, Mr. 'Eron.

DENNIS.

A holiday?

VEALE.

Holiday! What d'ye think, sir?—I've sold the stables and goodwill at Baverstoke and bought a new business in London.

MRS. VEALE.

The West End of London.

VEALE.

Ay, the West End. You see, Mr. 'Eron, Baverstoke has been good enough for me, but it ain't quite appropriate for such as Mrs. Veale [*pointing to MRS. VEALE*]. Mr. 'Eron, for years I've been 'iding that lady's light under a bushel.

MRS. VEALE.

Very good of you to say so, father.

VEALE.

You mayn't know it, sir, but Mrs. Veale was Miss 'Enrietta Wilcox—'Etty for short.

DENNIS.

Indeed?

VEALE.

And two-and-twenty years ago she was as smart a Park rider as London could show. Many a London aristocrat owes her 'ands and seat to the teachin's of Miss 'Enrietta Wilcox, though I say it.

MRS. VEALE.

I can't deny *that*.

VEALE.

Well, sir, Miss Wilcox comes down to Baverstoke with her father, buying 'orses, sees a smart young fellow just starting trade, and falls mad in love with him. Heh, 'Etty?

MRS. VEALE.

The other way round, I'm thinking.

VEALE.

Hah, mother!

MRS. VEALE.

[*Nudging him with his hat.*] Go along!

[*He laughs asthmatically. She takes a coloured handkerchief from her handbag and hands it to him.*]

VEALE.

Thank ye [*mopping his brow*]. And so, sir, now that I can turn myself round, as the sayin' is, 'Etty's going to town to show 'em that fifteen stone can sit as graceful and elegant to-day as nine-stone-six did two-and-twenty years ago.

MRS. VEALE.

Lor', John, how you do rattle on.

VEALE.

[*Returning his handkerchief to MRS. VEALE, who replaces it in the handbag.*] Thank ye. [*To DENNIS.*] And that's how you see us, sir. As I felt bound to obey Miss Brent's honoured commands we drove over from Baverstoke intendin' to get the up train at Lydgate at one-fifteen. How's your father? A fine gentleman, your father. Your looking a bit out o' condition, if you'll excuse the liberty.

DENNIS.

I? Oh, no.

VEALE.

Tell me about them 'orses, Mr. 'Eron.

[DENNIS and VEALE talk together.]

MARGARET.

[*To MRS. VEALE—in an undertone.*] Ma, you don't think Mr. Dennis is going to get into any scrape, do you?

MRS. VEALE.

Lor', how?

MARGARET.

Through running into debt to pa for that black hunter.

MRS. VEALE.

Why the hunter's a present from his own fater.

MARGARET.

Is it? Then why does he look so different to-day?

MRS. VEALE.

Different!

MARGARET.

From when we've seen him laughing and chatting
in our yard at Baverstoke.

MRS. VEALE.

Gracious, Meg, what eyes you have! P'rhaps he's
bilious.

MARGARET.

Ma!

MISS BRENT *enters*.

MISS BRENT.

Good morning, Mr. Veale.

VEALE.

Morning to you, ma'am. I hope you'll excuse the
intrusion, but me and my folk are on our way to
London which obleeges me to answer your telegram
with self and family, so to speak. Mrs. Veale—my
daughter, Margaret—Miss Brent.

MRS. VEALE.

I hope I see you well, I'm sure.

[MISS BRENT *inclines her head politely to*
MRS. VEALE, *then rings the bell*.

VEALE.

[*Seemingly disappointed.*] Mrs. Veale was formerly
Miss 'Enrietta Wilcox, well known in the West End
of London and all the principal 'orse-shows.

MISS BRENT.

Indeed! While I speak a few words with you, Mr.
Veale, your wife and daughter will, I hope, take some
refreshment in another room. [FLOYCE *appears*.]
Floyce— [Instructing him in an undertone.]

MRS. VEALE.

[*To VEALE.*] I didn't know I was to be in the way, John!

VEALE.

No, 'Etty, my dear; no, no.

[*MISS BRENT looks at MRS. VEALE, who sails across the room, followed by MARGARET.*

MRS. VEALE.

[*At the door.*] John—remember I have your hat.

[*MRS. VEALE and MARGARET go out, followed by FLOYCE.*

MISS BRENT.

Sit down.

VEALE.

Thank ye.

[*DENNIS is going away.*

MISS BRENT.

Dennis—you ought to hear what passes between Mr. Veale and myself. Forgive me; you'll understand by-and-by. Mr. Veale, I may tell you at once that so far as Mr. Roderick Heron's money matters are concerned, I am—in his confidence.

VEALE.

No gentleman could 'ave a better adviser, I'm sure, ma'am.

MISS BRENT.

Unhappily my advice has little weight—which brings me to the point. Mr. Veale, Mr. Heron tells me he owes you four hundred and forty guineas.

VEALE.

That's right, ma'am. But I heartily 'ope he won't let it worry him.

MISS BRENT. -

He will not.

VEALE.

Glad to hear it—because I've always found Mr. 'Eron readier to overpay than to underpay, and as prompt as a prince.

MISS BRENT.

Quite so—that is precisely Mr. Heron's character. Therefore I send for you, believing you to be an honest man, to make you this earnest, confidential request.

VEALE.

Cert'nly, ma'am, cert'nly.

MISS BRENT.

To request that, as Mr. Heron's liberality is apt to outrun his discretion, you will, in all future dealings with him, first consult *me*. [DENNIS *looks from one to the other.*] You consent, or decline?

VEALE.

Neither, ma'am. You've come to the wrong party; I've sold my business to Mr. Joseph Battersby of Barcombe, and I've cleared out of Baverstoke for good and all.

MISS BRENT.

Ah. Thank you.

[*She rings the bell.*]

VEALE.

[*To himself.*] Fancy that now! I could a'took my oath he was a millionaire.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Calling outside.*] Dennis! Dennis! [RODERICK enters, immaculately dressed in London fashion, and carrying a cheque-book.] I hunt everywhere for you, dear Dennis. Ah, Veale, I'm delighted with the hunters, you know—really delighted. By-the-by, look out for a match for my roan mare; I'm in want of a smart pair for driving—in terrible want, you know.

FLOYCE enters.

MISS BRENT.

Mr. Veale, the servant will take you to your wife and daughter.

RODERICK HERON.

Good-bye—good-bye.

[*He sits at the writing-table, writing busily and humming a chansonette. VEALE glances at DENNIS, who is standing with his head bowed in thought: at the door he turns and bows to MISS BRENT.*

MISS BRENT.

Good morning.

VEALE.

[*In a whisper.*] There's some mistake. I could a'took my oath he was a millionaire!

[*He follows FLOYCE out.*

RODERICK HERON.

I'm writing you a cheque, my dear Dennis. You may want pocket-money while I'm gone; I try to think of everybody.

DENNIS.

[*In a whisper.*] Miss Brent! [*She comes to him.*] Tell me—is there any good reason for what you said to Veale?

MISS BRENT.

Yes, Dennis.

DENNIS.

You—you don't mean that dad is—hard up?

MISS BRENT.

Yes, Dennis, I do.

DENNIS.

[*With a groan.*] Oh! No wonder *she* despises me. He's poor and I——!

[*He drops into a chair, leaning his head on his hands.*]

MISS BRENT.

Dennis, you should have been told long since. Your father's fortune went years ago—he has no means—he is penniless.

DENNIS.

What! It's not true—it's impossible! Why, how——?

MISS BRENT.

Hush! Dennis, he lives upon the bounty of Camilla.

[*DENNIS remains quite still. RODERICK jumps up, flourishing his cheque.*]

RODERICK HERON.

[*Looking out of window.*] Ah, there's Camilla! [*Calling.*] My darling, come and say good-bye! I'm just off to town, Camilla.

DENNIS.

Camilla !

RODERICK HERON.

[*Handing DENNIS the cheque.*] My dear boy. [*With a look at RODERICK, DENNIS takes the cheque and stands staring at it.*] Dennis !

CAMILLA enters.

CAMILLA.

[*To RODERICK.*] Are you going, uncle ?

DENNIS.

I want to speak to Camilla, alone.

CAMILLA.

[*Looking at DENNIS.*] Ah ! [*In a whisper.*] What has happened ?

DENNIS.

[*Harshly.*] I want to speak to Camilla, alone.

RODERICK HERON.

Certainly, dear Dennis, certainly.

CAMILLA.

[*Whispering to MISS BRENT.*] He knows—you have told him ?

MISS BRENT.

Yes. Mr. Heron—Mr. Heron.

[*RODERICK joins MISS BRENT, and they go out together.*]

DENNIS.

[*Holding the cheque before CAMILLA.*] My father has given me this money.

CAMILLA.

Yes, Dennis ?

DENNIS.

It is not *his* money that he gives. It is yours ! It is yours !

CAMILLA.

Well ?

DENNIS.

I—I'm not ready at saying what I mean. I dare say I'm slow-witted. But, look here ! God knows you're a generous woman—none can gainsay that—but—in bringing me to this humiliation, you've done me—a wrong.

[He tears the cheque into pieces and lets them flutter to her feet, then he turns away.]

CAMILLA.

Uncle desired to keep his position a secret——

DENNIS.

Oh !

CAMILLA.

But I meant to tell you, hereafter. Only I have been hoping to see you discontented with your still, dull life. I have thought you would one day form some plan for your future—some ambitious scheme such as comes to most men—and then you should have learnt my share in making your career.

DENNIS.

And when the time passed and I remained what I am ?

CAMILLA.

Then I was—sorry.

DENNIS.

Sorry! Yes, and still kept me, as you'd keep a ragged boy, with the privilege of holding me in your contempt! Your—contempt!

[The music of the violin and piano is heard again.]

CAMILLA.

You are a little hard, Dennis.

DENNIS.

Yes—on myself. But you—*[his voice breaking]* God bless you! We may not have another chance of meeting before I get out of Fauncourt *[holding out his hand]*, so—good-bye.

CAMILLA.

[Starting, then drawing herself up with cold dignity.]
As you please. Good-bye.

[She takes his hand and goes out, leaving him leaning against a table.]

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THE SECOND ACT

DENNIS SETS FOOT IN A NEW WORLD.

The scene is a large living-room, which serves also as an office, at the Hyde Park Riding Academy, with sliding doors opening on to a gallery which overlooks the riding-school. There is a cheerful, "horsey," business-like look about the place. Three months have elapsed since the events of the previous act.

JOHN VEALE *is busy with his account-books at a high desk ; while* MRS. VEALE, *in a riding-habit of not the latest fashion, is sitting at the breakfast-table cutting bread-and-butter.*

MRS VEALE.

John! John! [*He makes no answer.*] Shut your books, father, and come to breakfast.

VEALE.

Comin,' 'Etty. [*Approaching her.*] What a picture you look !

MRS. VEALE.

Go along, now !

VEALE.

The smartest woman I've seen in London. Bless her!

[*He kisses her, as AMELIA, a clean, but insignificant servant-girl, enters with some breakfast-things on a tray.*]

MRS. VEALE.

The gal! [*Pushing him away. AMELIA places the things on the table; then leaves a copy of the "London Journal" on another table.*] [*To VEALE.*] You should be more mindful; it does put such ideas in a young gal's head. 'Melia.

AMELIA.

What say, m'm?

MRS. VEALE.

Call Miss Margaret.

AMELIA.

Yes, m'm; she do lie late. Oh, and please, m'm, Wimple is wishful for to speak to master.

MRS. VEALE.

Send him upstairs.

AMELIA.

Yes, m'm.

[*AMELIA goes out.*]

VEALE.

What's Wimple want? Something's wrong again with that mare o' yours, I expect, 'Etty.

AMELIA.

[*Calling outside.*] Miss Marg'rit! Miss Marg'rit!

VEALE.

I'm afeard "Starlight" isn't quite up to your weight, mother.

MRS. VEALE.

Upon my word, Veale, it's most unfeeling in you to cast such reflections.

VEALE.

Reflections, 'Etty, my darling !

MARGARET, *with a bright face and rosy cheeks, and dressed in a smart riding-habit, enters briskly.*

MARGARET.

Good morning ! [*Kissing* MRS. VEALE.] Ain't I lazy ? [*Kissing* VEALE.] Oh, pa, how glum you look !

VEALE.

I've gone and upset your mother, Meg.

MARGARET.

Not you. What's to eat ?

[*VEALE helps* MARGARET.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Pouring out tea—bitterly.*] Your father's found out that "Starlight" isn't up to my weight ; that's the latest.

MARGARET.

I don't think she is, ma, if you want the truth.

VEALE.

Be quiet ! Erritating your mother !

MRS. VEALE.

Oh, don't stop her ! Now that Miss Margaret Veale's found fit to give lessons in the Hyde Park Riding Academy, Miss Henrietta Wilcox may take a very back seat.

VEALE.

Never.

MRS. VEALE.

Though I *have* lost eighteen pounds solid weight since we came to Knightsbridge; eighteen pounds in three months.

VEALE.

[*Soothingly*]. Don't overdo it, mother, don't overdo it.

MRS. VEALE.

I half starve myself, I know that.

VEALE.

You do indeed, 'Etty.

MRS. VEALE.

I'll trouble you for some of that steak, John.

[*AMELIA enters.*]

AMELIA.

'Ere's Wimple.

WIMPLE *the grov'n enters in his shirt-sleeves, but*
AMELIA assists him to put on his coat.

WIMPLE.

Mornin', missus—mornin', guv'nor. [*To AMELIA.*]
Private.

[*He shows AMELIA to the door.*]

VEALE.

What is it?

WIMPLE.

Business interview. [*Handing a small piece of soiled and crumpled paper to MRS. VEALE.*] Dooly written, I b'lieve.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Passing the paper to VEALE.*] I haven't got my spectacles.

VEALE.

Whose scribble's this?

WIMPLE.

That's my sister-in-law's 'and.

VEALE.

Can't make it out. [*Giving the paper to MARGARET.*] Here, Meg.

MARGARET.

[*Shrinking from it.*] Don't, pa! Tell pa what it is, Wimple, directly.

WIMPLE.

It is my notice for to quit and leave the 'yde Park Ridin' Academy at the week end.

VEALE.

[*Violently.*] What for?

MRS. VEALE.

Now, John!

WIMPLE.

I can no longer stand, or put up with, the 'igh-and-mighty tone took towards me and them under me by the riding'-master—this yer Mr. Dennison.

VEALE.

Oh!

MRS. VEALE.

Well, I never!

MARGARET.

What have you got to say to pa about Mr. Dennison?

WIMPLE.

Well, look 'ere, miss. In the old guv'nor's time the riding-masters and me was—well, chummy; friendly dooring work and takin' pleasure in each other's society after hours.

MARGARET.

Very likely. But Mr. Dennison——

MRS. VEALE.

Be quiet, Meg!

WIMPLE.

Now, with this yer Mr. Dennison, it ain't "Mr. Wimple, oblige me by doing this yer or that there," but it's "Wimple, put a saddle on Kitty and look sharp about it!" and I 'ave known him say "Wimple, when you go to your dinner leave word where a letter will find yer."

VEALE.

Ah!

WIMPLE.

And so I've made up my mind, guv'nor, as follows—either I go or this yer Dennison goes.

VEALE.

Very well, Wimple; I'll meet your views with pleasure.

WIMPLE.

[*Beamingly.*] Thank yer, guv'nor, I noo you would. You ken tear up that dockyment, miss. Don't be 'ard on this yer Dennison, guv'nor; I don't ask that.

VEALE.

[*Eating.*] Thank ye.

MARGARET.

[*Scornfully.*] Hah!

WIMPLE.

Give 'im a character. I never see his like on a 'orse; it's 'is manner on terry-firmer what queers 'im. Nice mornin,' ain't it?

MARGARET.

[*To herself.*] Impudent fellow!

WIMPLE.

[*Opening the door, then returning quickly.*] 'Ere! Look 'ere! Am I fallin' into any error? I said I go or this yer Dennison goes—didn't I?

VEALE.

You did.

WIMPLE.

Well, *who* goes?

VEALE.

You go.

[DENNIS HERON *enters in riding dress.*]

DENNIS.

Wimple, the tan hasn't been raked over in the school yet. Don't fall asleep downstairs.

WIMPLE.

'Ere, I—! Well—I—! Oh, crikey!

[WIMPLE *goes out.*]

DENNIS.

Good morning.

VEALE AND MRS. VEALE.

Good morning.

VEALE.

'Ave a bit o' breakfast, sir ?

DENNIS.

Mrs. Veale shall give me a cup of tea, if she will.

MARGARET.

[*Coming to him, offering to take his hat and coat.*]
Take my place, Mr. Dennison ; I've finished.

DENNIS.

Thank you, Meg—why should you trouble ?

[*He hangs up his hat and coat.*]

MARGARET.

[*Calling at the door.*] Amelia !

DENNIS.

Busy day, I hope, Veale ?

VEALE.

Pretty fair, sir ; pretty fair.

[*AMELIA appears in the doorway.*]

MARGARET.

A cup and saucer for Mr. Dennison. [*In a whisper.*] One of ma's best cups.

[*AMELIA disappears, MARGARET sits, and takes up the "London Journal," which she cuts with her fingers.*]

VEALE.

You're the punctualist young gentleman we've ever had dealings with, Mr. Dennison.

DENNIS.

[*Sitting at the table.*] I'm a new broom, Veale.

VEALE.

Not tired of a bit of work yet, sir?

[*MARGARET looks up.*

DENNIS.

Tired! I've a poor man's best encouragement—I can't afford to get tired.

VEALE.

[*Standing on the hearthrug and smoking a cigarette.*] Ha, ha! How your dear father would scold us if he 'eared you describin' yourself as a poor man!

DENNIS.

I daresay; there's a little difference between my father and me on that point, Veale.

VEALE.

I know, sir, I know. But he's a very affable gentleman, your father, sir—one of the affablest gentlemen I've met.

[*AMELIA enters with a cup and saucer.*]

MRS. VEALE.

'Melia, this is my best china!

MARGARET.

[*Under her breath.*] Ma!

AMELIA.

Miss Mar'grit—

MARGARET.

[*To AMELIA.*] S-s-sh !

[*AMELIA goes out.*

DENNIS.

[*Pushing another cup and saucer towards MRS. VEALE.*] Never mind ; this will do for me.

MARGARET.

No—that's my cup !

MRS. VEALE.

[*Pouring out tea.*] Well, it won't poison Mr. Dennison, child.

[*MARGARET turns her face from the breakfast-table in confusion.*

VEALE.

'Ave you seen your poor dear father lately, Mr. Dennison ?

DENNIS.

No, Veale.

VEALE.

Thought he might 'ave called on you at your lodging. He 'asn't been near us for—'ow long, mother ?

MRS. VEALE.

More'n a week, John.

VEALE.

Ah ! One of the friendliest gentlemen we've ever known, your father, sir.

DENNIS.

Yes. What's the day's work, Veale ?

VEALE.

The day's work? [*Going to the desk, taking up a long parchment-covered book, and reading.*] Ten-thirty. 'Alf an hour on the road; old gentleman o' the name of Trotman, 95a Sloane Street. Mr. Dennison.

DENNIS.

[*Making notes.*] All right.

VEALE.

Eleven-thirty. Class in school; Miss Cheeseman's Young Ladies. Mr. Dennison and Miss Veale.

DENNIS.

All right.

MARGARET.

All right.

VEALE.

Twelve o'clock. Hour on the road. Miss Cardelloe; Miss Charlotte Cardelloe; Miss Hubertina Cardelloe; Master Philip Cardelloe. Cadogan Square. [*Looking at MRS. VEALE with pride.*] Miss 'Enrietta Wilcox—Mrs. Veale!

MRS. VEALE.

Ah!

VEALE.

The foregoing are a nervous family.

MRS. VEALE.

Why don't you hire me out with a bath-chair, John?

VEALE.

'Etty, my dear. [*Resuming.*] Twelve-thirty. 9 Porchester Mansions; Miss de Vere. Ridin'-master to wait if the young person's not down. Mr. Dennison.

MARGARET.

[*To herself with a stamp of her foot.*] Oh!

VEALE.

Three o'clock. Hour in the Park. Lady Spilsbury and the Honourable Miss Bunce. Miss 'Enrietta Wilcox—Mrs. Veale.

MRS. VEALE.

The Park.

VEALE.

Hah, mother! Four o'clock. Class in school. Mr. Dennison and Miss Veale.

DENNIS.

Sloane Street—ten-thirty. I'm off.

[*MRS. VEALE rings the bell and removes some of the breakfast-things.*

VEALE.

[*Throwing back the sliding doors and calling.*] Wimple!

[*MARGARET assists DENNIS with his coat.*

DENNIS.

Thanks.

[*AMELIA enters, carrying a tray, and clears the table, assisted by MRS. VEALE.*

VEALE.

[*Leaning over the balustrade of the gallery.*] Now then, Wimple!

WIMPLE.

[*From the riding-school below.*] 'Yessir?

VEALE.

Saddle "Juno" and "Sunshine" for Mr. Dennison d'rectly.

WIMPLE.

Right, guv'nor.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Calling from the riding-school below.*] How do you do, dear Mr. Veale, how do you do?

VEALE.

Bless me, it's Mr. 'Eron. Come up them stairs, sir! That's right! Mind your 'ead, Mr. 'Eron!

RODERICK HERON.

[*Outside, but nearer.*] A delightful morning—really a delightful morning. [*Entering and shaking hands with VEALE.*] The kind of morning which makes a man a better man, a more generous man. [*Shaking hands with DENNIS.*] Ah, here is—[*glancing at AMELIA*] dear Mr. Dennison. [*To MARGARET.*] And Miss Veale, looking prettier than ever.

MARGARET.

Oh, Mr. Heron!

RODERICK HERON.

And Mrs. Veale too—Mrs. Veale in her habit as she lives. Good morning, Amelia. [*Dropping some silver upon the tray she is carrying.*] A new ribbon for Sunday, Amelia.

AMELIA.

Oh, thank you, sir.

[AMELIA goes out.]

RODERICK HERON.

I never give myself the pleasure of dropping in here without realising one pleasant fact—the Veale household is a happy household, a simple household, a delightful household.

VEALE.

Much obliged to Mr. 'Eron ; eh, mother ?

MRS. VEALE.

That we are, John.

RODERICK HERON.

There is only one jarring note, if I may be permitted to observe it—[*pointing to DENNIS*]-the curious spectacle of the son of—shall I say a well-to-do parent—?

DENNIS.

[*To RODERICK.*] Father !

RODERICK HERON.

The son of a well-to-do and indulgent parent labouring under the Quixotic notion that a young man ought to do some kind of work, you know.

DENNIS.

We won't talk about that just now. I'm going out to give half an hour's lesson.

RODERICK HERON.

Are you ? Now that amuses me, you know—the idea is so whimsical. Well, do your duty ; always do what you consider your duty. Dear Mrs. Veale will let me stay till you come back, I dare say.

[DENNIS goes out on to the gallery where
MARGARET is now standing.]

DENNIS.

[As he goes towards the steps.] Good-bye, Meg.

MARGARET.

[Looking after him.] Good-bye, Mr. Dennison.

RODERICK HERON.

[Quietly to VEALE, eyeing MARGARET and MRS. VEALE.]
Ahem ! my dear Veale.

VEALE.

All right, sir. Meg, run away for a minute, my dear.

MARGARET.

Yes, pa.

[She goes out.]

RODERICK HERON.

[To JOHN, looking at MRS. VEALE, whose back is
turned towards them.] Mrs. Veale, eh ?

VEALE.

Well, sir, I hope you'll excuse me, but I've taken the liberty of mentioning this little matter of business to Mrs. Veale. 'Etty, my dear.

E.

RODERICK HERON.

[*To himself.*] Really, you know, damn ! [*To VEALE.*] Now I am quite charmed to hear that we have taken Mrs. Veale into our confidence. I was about to suggest it—I really was.

MRS. VEALE.

Lor', sir, he hasn't told me much.

RODERICK HERON.

For shame, Veale, for shame ! You should have no secrets from Mrs. Veale.

VEALE.

Well, Mr 'Eron, I 'adn't much to tell.

MRS. VEALE.

Why, no, sir ; all John knows is that you've asked him to write his name to a—what is it, father ?

VEALE.

Bill of Exchange, 'Etty.

RODERICK HERON.

Precisely—Bill of Exchange, you know. I open my heart to you, dear Mrs. Veale ; a woman's sympathy is very precious——

MRS. VEALE.

[*Moving about with a duster.*] Much obliged, I'm sure, sir.

RODERICK HERON.

I'm sympathetic myself, you know. Now I intend this morning to exercise one of the privileges of a man of means; I am going to shift a portion of a very considerable income from the future to the present. Men of imagination call this an act of pecuniary prophesy, but it is what is familiarly known as an advance. An advance, you know.

VEALE.

Yes, sir, I know.

RODERICK HERON.

Now I mustn't boast, but by obtaining this advance from my friend, Mr. Benson, of Burlington Street, I shall be able to make the approaching Christmas a joyous one for many persons; in point of fact, I shall open my purse-strings rather wider this Christmas than usual. It's a delightful feeling, you know, really a delightful feeling. Veale, I am to present you to Mr. Benson in Burlington Street, at eleven o'clock.

VEALE.

[*Looking inquiringly at Mrs. VEALE.*] Eh, 'Etty?

MRS. VEALE.

H'm! you'll excuse me, I hope, Mr. Heron, for what I'm going to say——

RODERICK HERON.

Charmed, you know.

MRS. VEALE.

I'm sure no one could be more sensible than me and John of the honour of being on such friendly terms with gentry—eh, father?

VEALE.

We take it as a great compliment, sir—that we do.

RODERICK HERON.

My good souls, you've been exceedingly indulgent to my mistaken boy, and I like you. There—now you have it—I like you.

VEALE.

Thank ye, sir.

MRS. VEALE.

Thank you, Mr. Heron. Only neither John nor I understands much about this sort of business, and what little we do know of it frightens us. Now it's out.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Taking MRS. VEALE'S hand gallantly.*] Then, my dear Mrs. Veale, let me acknowledge the honour you do me in entrusting your husband's welfare to my keeping. I regard this as a very precious responsibility—and so will Mr. Benson. We'll start for Burlington Street in ten minutes. The matter is settled.

MRS. VEALE.

Then I'll say no more, sir. I shouldn't have spoken to a gentleman in this way, only—only——

RODERICK HERON.

Only what, my dear lady? Tell me, you know, tell me.

MRS. VEALE.

Only John and I have been married two-and-twenty years—and I daresay I'm vexing to him now and again—but we've faced our troubles together—having laid three children to rest—and so—so [*laying her hand on VEALE'S shoulder and speaking huskily*] please don't let any harm come to my old man.

VEALE.

Why, mother !

MRS. VEALE.

[*Brushing the tears from her eyes.*] All right, father,
all right. [*She goes out quickly.*]

VEALE.

Bless my soul ! Something's upset Mrs. Veale, sir.

DENNIS *enters, with a bunch of violets in his hand.*

RODERICK HERON.

Dennis !

DENNIS.

The old gentleman can't ride this morning, Veale ;
he has gout in his knee.

VEALE.

[*Going to his desk.*] Oh ! He must pay for his
lesson if he's got it in his stomach.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Talking apart with DENNIS.*] Well, dear Dennis ?

DENNIS.

Well, father ?

RODERICK HERON.

So you still herd with these common people eh ?

DENNIS

And you still live on my cousin Camilla, eh ?

RODERICK HERON

The—ah—pecuniary relations between Camilla and
myself remain uninterrupted.

DENNIS

[*In disgust.*] Hah !

RODERICK HERON.

My dear Dennis! My child! You take a distorted view of our indebtedness to Camilla—you do really.

DENNIS.

Oh, I'm ashamed; that's all.

RODERICK HERON.

Now that is a feeling I cannot understand. Why ashamed? Camilla is wealthy—no credit to her; she can't help it. We're poor—no discredit to us: *we* can't help it. Camilla has a large house, with empty rooms and beds in them—why on earth shouldn't we occupy those rooms and air those beds? Camilla's cook prepares a dinner for four persons—a dinner for four is a dinner for six. Really, you know, an extra oyster in the oyster-sauce, or an additional pinch of curry in the Mulligatawny, represents—looked at in the right way—the extent of our obligations to Camilla. [DENNIS turns away angrily. VEALE goes out.] Ah, our lower-class friend is considerate enough to leave us for a moment. Our lower-class friend is very h'less.

DENNIS.

So's the word "honesty"; we can speak of him as we find him.

RODERICK HERON.

Good! capital! [*Poking the fire vigorously.*] What filthy fires you keep here! Where do you sleep now, Dennis—in a cornbin?

DENNIS.

I've a little room close at hand. It's a poor place—I can't ask you to come and see me.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Wiping the dust from his hands on the table cover.*]
I couldn't do it, dear Dennis. It would pain me, you know.

DENNIS.

Where are *you*?

RODERICK HERON.

I'm at Croome's Hotel in Jermyn Street. I'm fairly comfortable. I *can* ask you to call on me. So do, do, dear Dennis, abandon this crazy desire to earn your own living. It's not even original; so many men have it. And, great heavens, you'll compromise me—you really will! If people learn that my son is a cad of a riding-master, they'll think I—I've no means, you know.

DENNIS.

Look here—I don't think you and I quite understand one another.

RODERICK HERON.

Let us do so!

DENNIS.

These common people, as you call 'em, are hard-working people, sincere people, good people.

RODERICK HERON.

Confound 'em!

DENNIS.

No—God bless 'em! Hark, father—one more word about this and then have done with it. When I left Lydgate I *did* think of how I might earn my bread-and-meat in what you'd call a gentlemanlike fashion. I walked London till I was lame; I buttonholed a few friends——

RODERICK HERON.

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DENNIS.

Where are *you*?

RODERICK HERON.

I'm at Croome's Hotel in Jermyn Street. I'm fairly comfortable. I *can* ask you to call on me. So do, do, dear Dennis, abandon this crazy desire to earn your own living. It's not even original; so many men have it. And, great heavens, you'll compromise me—you really will! If people learn that my son is a cad of a riding-master, they'll think I—I've no means, you know.

DENNIS.

Look here—I don't think you and I quite understand one another.

RODERICK HERON.

Let us do so!

DENNIS.

These common people, as you call 'em, are hard-working people, sincere people, good people.

RODERICK HERON.

Confound 'em!

DENNIS.

No—God bless 'em! Hark, father—one more word about this and then have done with it. When I left Lydgate I *did* think of how I might earn my bread-and-meat in what you'd call a gentlemanlike fashion. I walked London till I was lame; I buttonholed a few friends——

DENNIS.

Thanks. [*Joining MARGARET.*] Oh, Meg, I've been trading with your poor little lame flower merchant at the cab-stand. [*Giving her the violets.*] He's not making his fortune.

MARGARET.

Oh, Mr. Dennison !

RODERICK HERON.

[*To himself, watching MARGARET and DENNIS.*] Really, you know, that's a dangerous companionship. Now I do hope that nothing will prevent the accidental meeting between dear Dennis and his relatives which I have so carefully planned. [*MRS. VEALE enters.*] Are you ready for Burlington Street, Veale ?

VEALE.

Yes, sir. Dress me, mother.

[*JOHN takes down his hat, muffler, and overcoat from the hat-peg, and MRS. VEALE assists him. DENNIS and MARGARET stroll away.*]

RODERICK HERON.

[*To himself.*] I think I'll make things quite safe here.

VEALE.

Thank ye, 'Etty.

RODERICK HERON.

My good friends, I have reason to anticipate that some esteemed relations of mine will shortly inspect your admirable establishment.

VEALE.

'Etty !

MRS. VEALE.

Lor', Mr. Heron, have they found out about the young gentleman ?

RODERICK HERON.

Oh, no, no ; it's the purest coincidence, you know. My niece, Miss Beatrix Brent, who is in town, is to be permitted to take moderate exercise on horseback ; and she is to receive instruction at some valuable institution of this kind. So I contrived that her brother's servant should become acquainted with the Hyde Park Riding Academy.

MRS. VEALE.

You call this a coincidence, Mr. Heron !

RODERICK HERON.

To all outward appearances, quite, you know.

VEALE.

Well, sir, you'll excuse me——

RODERICK HERON.

[*Standing between VEALE and MRS. VEALE, taking their hands.*] Hah, hah ! you're going to scold me in your blunt, honest way for not respecting dear Dennis's foolish secret. But, my good souls, we are parents, and so you must help me to bring about a meeting between my naughty boy and a certain young lady whom he has treated—no, no, I will not tell you how he has treated a certain young lady.

VEALE.

What, Mr. Dennis !

MRS. VEALE.

Why, I'd as soon have thought ill of my John there !

RODERICK HERON.

I believe you, dear Mrs. Veale—otherwise you would scarcely permit this terribly dangerous companionship to exist between your charming daughter and a—no, I won't say a wicked young fellow ; I'll say a weak, impressionable young fellow.

VEALE.

Mr. 'Eron !

MRS. VEALE.

Father !

RODERICK HERON.

There, there, there ! I've sufficiently distressed a watchful mother. I feel quite a brute—I do really. Come along, Veale.

VEALE.

[To MRS. VEALE.] 'Etty, my dear !

MRS. VEALE.

[Solemnly giving VEALE his hat.] John—there's your hat. You leave this to me.

RODERICK HERON.

[To MRS. VEALE.] Good-bye. Now don't be too hard on my boy. I have spoilt him—it's my fault [taking VEALE by the arm]. I blame myself, you know—I blame myself for many things.

[VEALE and RODERICK go out. As they do so MARGARET enters and stands before a mirror, fixing DENNIS's violets in her habit and humming a song to herself quietly and happily. MRS. VEALE, taking her spectacle-case from her pocket, puts on her glasses with deliberation and watches MARGARET.]

MRS. VEALE.

What have you got there, Meg?

MARGARET.

Some violets.

MRS. VEALE.

Did your pa give 'em you?

MARGARET.

No, ma.

MRS. VEALE.

Who did give 'em you?

MARGARET.

Mr. Dennison.

MRS. VEALE.

Margaret.

MARGARET.

[*Brushing her hat.*] Well?

MRS. VEALE.

Your pa and I are thinking of making a bit of a change here, in the school.

MARGARET.

Oh! [*Surveying herself in the mirror as she puts on her hat.*] What sort of a change?

MRS. VEALE.

We're on the look-out for another riding-master.

MARGARET.

Another riding-master? To help Mr. Dennison?

MRS. VEALE.

No—in place of Mr. Dennison.

MARGARET.

[*Turning sharply.*] Why?

MRS. VEALE.

Well, dear, there seems to be something serious amiss between our young gentleman and his relations.

MARGARET.

What's that—to do—with us?

MRS. VEALE.

That's just it. It ain't our place to take one side or another; but by employing this young fellow in a capacity he wasn't brought up to, and making his dear father vexed and uncomfortable, we *are* taking one side, Meg, and p'rhaps we're doing wrong.

MARGARET.

We may be doing a bigger wrong by sending him away. [*Nervously trying to button her glove.*]

MRS. VEALE.

No, Meg, no; because, take my word for it, this sort of thing never answers. Shall I button your glove, dear?

MARGARET.

Thanks. [MRS. VEALE buttons MARGARET'S glove with the aid of a hairpin.] What do you mean by "this sort of thing"?

MRS. VEALE.

The mixing of gentry like him with people like us.

MARGARET.

People like us. I suppose we *are* common.

MRS. VEALE.

Common, Meg! No, no, my dear, we're not common, I hope—we're ordinary.

MARGARET.

[*To herself.*] Ordinary.

MRS. VEALE.

There's a good many fish between salmon and herrings, Meg. I don't think we're quite herrings; I should say we swim somewhere in the neighbourhood of the mackerel. [*Finishing with the glove.*] There! Give me a kiss.

[MARGARET goes to kiss MRS. VEALE; then she breaks down and puts her arms round her neck.]

MARGARET.

Oh, mother!

MRS. VEALE.

Why, Margaret! [*Dropping her spectacles unnoticed.*]

MARGARET.

[*Piteously.*] Mother, isn't it hard that we're not fit to associate with people who are gentle—and refined—and kind—and considerate, like—like this Mr. Dennison?

MRS. VEALE.

Ah! [*Looking into MARGARET's face.*] You mustn't let your head run on Mr. Dennison, Meg; you mustn't do that.

MARGARET.

[*Drawing herself away.*] I know what you mean, mother ; but, if you imagine such a thing, it's not true—it's not true. I only think of him as the one real gentleman we have ever known who has made himself our friend and our equal, and who treats one—just as if—one were—a lady. Oh, it's better to be born a cripple than to be born common !

[*She throws herself into a chair and rocks herself to and fro.*]

MRS. VEALE.

[*Standing by her and weeping.*] How can you be so wicked, Meg—going on like this ? Father paid Miss Twibble a hundred-and-twenty a year for your accomplishments—quite an aristocratic boarding-school.

MARGARET.

Yes !

MRS. VEALE.

I wonder you're not afraid of being struck like it—an ungrateful child !

MARGARET.

I *am* ungrateful. Why did father waste his money to make an imitation lady of me ? And what did Twibble try to teach me ? To sing, and play, and mince, and simper like those superior girls who wouldn't give me a nod now if they met me in the street ! Hah ! I only learnt the difference between the real and the sham ; I only learnt that they were born with quiet voices and easy ways and that, mimic as I might, I could never be anything but a *common young woman* !

MRS. VEALE.

It would break your father's heart if he heard you running down your education !

MARGARET.

You know it wouldn't, mother—but it's enough to break the hearts of girls like me to have such an education ! It makes us think, and build castles, and hope ; and it tortures us—that's all such education does for us—it tortures us.

DENNIS *enters*.

DENNIS.

[*To MARGARET.*] What'll you ride in the school this morning, Meg ?

MARGARET.

I—I'll ride " Pearl."

DENNIS.

Halloa, are you put out about anything ?

MARGARET.

I ! No.

MRS. VEALE.

May I have a few words with you, Mr. Dennison, before you go out ?

DENNIS.

Certainly—now. I'll just tell Wimpole to saddle the mare.

MARGARET.

No—I'll saddle her myself ; perhaps it'll be for the last time.

DENNIS.

For the last time, Meg ?

MARGARET.

Yes, I'm thinking of not going into the school after to-day. I—I'm tired of it—I'm tired of it.

[*She goes out.*]

DENNIS.

[*To himself, looking after her.*] What's the matter ?

MRS. VEALE.

Mr. Dennison. [*He goes to her.*] Mr. Dennison, a woman—at any rate a woman who isn't a young woman—may speak out to a young man without offence, I hope ; especially if she's honest and straightforward and means well to all parties.

DENNIS.

Certainly, Mrs. Veale. Do I happen to be the young man ?

MRS. VEALE.

Yes, sir, you do so happen. Mr. Heron—excuse me for going back to the old name—are you sure you're contented with the life you're living ?

DENNIS.

Contented ? Well—I contrive sometimes to forget the dunce, the idler, the fool, who bore the name you've just called me by ; that contents me. And I'm earning my bread, honestly. Yes—I'm contented.

MRS. VEALE.

Then, sir, I'm truly sorry to hear it—that I am !

DENNIS.

Sorry, Mrs. Veale ?

MRS. VEALE.

Because my husband and me are of one mind, and that mind's made up. We've got to part company, sir—you and us.

DENNIS.

Part company ! You don't mean you want—to be rid of me ?

MRS. VEALE.

I'd rather you didn't put it quite like that, sir—but it's what I *do* mean.

DENNIS.

What's the reason ?

MRS. VEALE.

[*Rising.*] Well, sir, that's just what I can't exactly tell you, but you must be content, Mr. Dennis, to know that it's better for us that you should leave us—better for us and better for you.

DENNIS.

Better ?

MRS. VEALE.

Ever so much—ever so much better. And now, sir, I'm dreadfully busy this morning ; I—I promised Veale I'd check his figures, that I did.

[*She bustles up to the desk rather uneasily and brings some heavy books down to the table.*]

DENNIS.

But—but you've been so kind to me, you and your husband, and Margaret——

MRS. VEALE.

Ahem ! [*Taking her spectacle-case from her pocket and finding it empty.*] Drat the thing ! where are my spectacles ?

DENNIS.

And now you turn me away like a lazy stable-hand.

MRS. VEALE.

Look here, Mr. Dennis Heron, I'll tell you this ! The reason's one that any honest, right-minded man is bound to respect. Come, sir ! won't you trust an old—a middle-aged woman, and take her word ?

DENNIS.

Oh, of course, I—I'll go.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Laying a hand on his shoulder.*] Thank you, my dear.

[*She turns from him and sits with the books before her.*]

DENNIS.

[*To himself.*] What is it ? What is it ?

WIMPLE *enters with a note.*

WIMPLE.

[*Giving DENNIS the note.*] For the Missus.

[*He goes out.*]

DENNIS.

[*Handing the note to MRS. VEALE.*] A note for you.

MRS. VEALE.

Thanks. [*Looking about her.*] Have you seen my glasses, Mr. Dennison? I'm a perfect bat without 'em. It's an order for the office, I fancy. [*Returning the note to DENNIS.*] Kindly tell me what it's about, sir—will you?

[*She resumes the search for her spectacles.*

DENNIS reads the note, and his expression alters to one of blank dismay.

DENNIS.

[*To himself.*] Meg!

[*He turns to MRS. VEALE, to speak to her, when there is a knock at the door.*

MRS. VEALE.

Yes?

AMELIA enters. DENNIS stares at the letter in a dazed manner.

AMELIA.

Please, m'm.

MRS. VEALE.

What are you doing, 'Melia; leaving your work?

AMELIA.

The clerk was wishful that I should look for you, m'm.

MRS. VEALE.

You've been gossiping with the clerk!

AMELIA.

Oh, no, m'm. Me and 'im was meally passin' the time of day when a gentleman and some ladies come into the office and asked for to be showed over the school.

MRS. VEALE.

A gentleman and some ladies ?

AMELIA.

Yes, m'm ; and the clerk was wishful to know if I would be good enough as to favour him by bein' so obligin' as to kindly assytain where you was. It is not my 'abit nor am I wishful to be drawn off my 'ousework.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Suddenly with a look at DENNIS and taking AMELIA apart.*] 'Melia !

AMELIA.

[*In a whisper.*] Yes, m'm ?

MRS. VEALE.

What are they like ? Describe 'em !

AMELIA.

Two young ladies of the age of my young sister and my married sister ; and a young gentleman of the age of my married sister's 'usband ; and a older lady something like Queen Elizabeth, speaking by 'earsay.

MRS. VEALE.

[*To herself.*] Miss Brent of Fauncourt ! [*Looking at DENNIS.*] Shall I—shall I ask 'em up here ?

AMELIA.

What say, m'm ?

MRS. VEALE.

S-s-sh ! [*To DENNIS.*] I'll be back in two minutes, Mr. Dennison. Melia !

[*She goes out, followed by AMELIA.*]

DENNIS.

Meg! Meg! [*He reads the note to himself.*]
"Mother. I told you a lie. I do care for him—I
do care for him with all my heart. I shall be happier
if you send him away." I—I understand. Meg!
The child of these people—these people who've been
good to me—and trusted me. Poor little Meg!
What a shame—what a shame!

[*WIMPLE appears in the gallery, carrying a
bridle and a leather.*]

WIMPLE.

[*Looking into the room.*] Gettin' on for class time,
Mister Dennison.

DENNIS.

[*Abstractedly.*] Thank you. [*Folding the note
carefully and placing it in his pocket.*] It's my fault;
it must be all my fault. Poor little Meg—what a
shame! [*He goes out in deep thought.*]

WIMPLE.

[*Looking after DENNIS.*] Reclinin' in a armchair
a'readin' his letters like a dook. Well, that chap
beats me! The Missus!

[*He rubs the bridle energetically as MRS.
VEALE enters, looking round, nervously.*]

MRS. VEALE.

[*To WIMPLE.*] Where's Mr. Dennison?

WIMPLE.

[*Glancing over the balustrade.*] He's just walked into the stables—a'talkin' to Miss Marg'rit.

MISS BRENT *enters, followed by* BEATRIX. WIMPLE *strolls away.*

MISS BRENT.

[*To* MRS. VEALE.] Thank you.

BEATRIX.

[*To* CAMILLA *as she enters, pale and sad looking.*] Here's a fire, Cam.

CAMILLA.

[*With a shiver.*] Oh!

[*She goes languidly to the fire.*

MISS BRENT.

[*To* MRS. VEALE.] We are to wait here?

LUCIAN *enters.*

MRS. VEALE.

Well, I know my husband would feel honoured to show you over the school and the stables himself.

LUCIAN.

As a matter of fact, our time is rather precious.
[*To* MISS BRENT.] I have to go to my hosiers, you know, aunt.

CAMILLA.

Pray allow me to get warm, Lucian.

MRS. VEALE.

Mr. Veale won't be long, I'm sure.

MISS BRENT.

Mr. Veale of Baverstoke ?

MRS. VEALE.

Yes, miss.

MISS BRENT.

Dear me ! I think you came with your husband to Fauncourt ?

MRS. VEALE.

I did.

MISS BRENT.

How do you do ? Camilla, how strange !

LUCIAN.

Oh, of course ; my uncle, Mr. Roderick Heron, took " Strephon " and " Chloe," the two hunters, from your stable, didn't he ?

MRS. VEALE.

Y-yes, sir. I hope they're doing well this season.

CAMILLA.

We do not hunt at Fauncourt this season. Mr. Dennis Heron has brought his stay at Fauncourt to a close. His horse " Strephon " now belongs to me. I prize him—highly.

LUCIAN.

He's as fat as a pig ; does no work and is petted like a spaniel.

CAMILLA.

[*Angrily.*] Lucian !

LUCIAN

What's the matter, Cam? [*To himself, looking at CAMILLA.*] Temper! [*Strolling into the gallery and looking over the balustrade.*] Halloa — the riding-school!

BEATRIX.

Oh! [*Looking through the opening.*] How delightful! [*To MRS. VEALE.*] It is I who am to ride.

MRS. VEALE.

Indeed, miss.

BEATRIX.

When you were in business at Baverstoke I daresay you heard how delicate I was.

MRS. VEALE.

No, miss, I hadn't that pleasure.

BEATRIX.

Oh, you must have heard and forgotten. You will feel extremely sorry when I tell you that I am still most fragile.

LUCIAN.

[*Mockingly.*] Ho, ho!

BEATRIX.

[*To MISS BRENT.*] Aunt, is Lucian to be allowed to behave quite in that way?

MISS BRENT.

Lucian!

LUCIAN.

All right. Only *I've* been obliged to come down from Cambridge because my head's given way; that's what I call being delicate.

BEATRIX.

[*In the gallery leaning over the balustrade.*] Shall I learn here?

MRS. VEALE.

Y-yes, miss.

BEATRIX.

There are some people riding now.

MRS. VEALE.

They are the young ladies from Mrs. Cheeseman's school, miss. [LUCIAN joins BEATRIX and looks down upon the riding-school.] They have an hour every Monday at eleven.

BEATRIX.

It's nearly eleven. May we watch the lesson? Who will teach?

MRS. VEALE.

My daughter and—and—the riding-master.

BEATRIX.

Oh! [*Calling.*] Aunty!

[*She, LUCIAN, and MRS. VEALE watch all that is going on below with interest.*]

MISS BRENT.

[*Tenderly to CAMILLA, who is sitting with her head thrown back in thought.*] You look very lonely there.

CAMILLA.

Dreaming, aunt.

MISS BRENT.

Always in the clouds, dear.

CAMILLA.

Aunty, have you ever visited a strange spot and found it familiar to you? I seem to know this queer place quite well. Do you think I lived here in my former existence, when I was a cat or something?

MISS BRENT.

It is the aspect of the stable in everything that recalls——

CAMILLA.

That recalls what Fauncourt used to be. Yes—and Fauncourt is dull enough now for our pains. We drove the life out of it, you and I, when we sent—him away. How cruel we were!

MISS BRENT.

Will you ever forgive me for my share in that, Camilla?

CAMILLA.

I love you, Aunt Anne, dearly [*drawing* MISS BRENT *to her fondly*]; but, no—I will never forgive you, never, never, never.

MISS BRENT.

[*Smiling sadly.*] Ah!

MRS. VEALE.

[*To BEATRIX.*] If you stand over there, miss, at the end of the gallery, you'll get a better view of the riders. I—I must go downstairs to the office.

BEATRIX.

Point out your daughter to me, first.

MRS. VEALE.

She's not there yet, miss. [*The sounds of jingling bits and horses' hoofs are heard.*] Yes—here she comes, with——! Excuse me! [*She goes away.*]

BEATRIX.

[*Looking into the room.*] Camilla! Aunt! Come and watch! Oh, do! Lucian!

[*BEATRIX runs out, followed by LUCIAN.*]

MISS BRENT.

Camilla?

CAMILLA.

Let me wait here, please. [*MISS BRENT goes on to the gallery, glances over the balustrade, and follows the others.*] Why do I stir out of doors when strange places and strange sounds tease me so! The air of the stables—Dennis! The tread of the horses—Dennis! [*Dreamily.*] Day, dusk, sunlight, firelight, shadow—all recalling—our Dennis. [*Closing her eyes.*] Not our Dennis—nobody cared for him as I cared for him. *My Dennis—my Dennis—*

[*The indistinct sound of DENNIS's voice is heard directing the lesson. CAMILLA's eyes open; then she raises her head slowly, staring before her, with parted lips. His voice is heard again. With a faint cry CAMILLA rises.*]

LUCIAN.

[*In the distance.*] Dennis! Dennis! [LUCIAN appears in the gallery.] I say, Cam! Look here!

BEATRIX.

[*Running in.*] Camilla, here's Dennis!

[LUCIAN and BEATRIX run out again.]

MISS BRENT.

[*Coming to CAMILLA.*] Camilla!

CAMILLA.

I know.

[*She walks away and stands looking down into the fire.*]

MISS BRENT.

[*Meeting DENNIS, who enters with BEATRIX and LUCIAN.*] Dennis!

DENNIS.

[*Taking her hand.*] Miss Brent.

[MISS BRENT, LUCIAN, and BEATRIX glance towards CAMILLA; DENNIS's eyes follow theirs.]

DENNIS.

Camilla.

[*She turns without speaking, then she extends her hand.*]

CAMILLA

[*In a low voice.*] Dennis.

DENNIS.

I thank you. This is like you. I thank you.

CAMILLA.

Thank me?

DENNIS.

For thinking me worth recovering.

CAMILLA.

You are mistaken, Dennis. We are here by chance.

DENNIS.

Chance!

CAMILLA.

Beatrice is to learn to ride——

BEATRICE.

Yes.

CAMILLA.

And we are looking for a riding-school——

DENNIS.

And a good riding-master?

CAMILLA.

A—riding-master!

DENNIS.

Yes. Let me introduce myself. My name is Dennison, and I teach riding here for a living.

CAMILLA.

[*Turning from him reproachfully.*] Oh!

BEATRIX.

[*To DENNIS, affectionately.*] Never mind; we're so glad we've found you.

MISS BRENT.

Beatrix!

[*MISS BRENT and LUCIAN go on to the gallery and stand, with their backs towards the room, looking down into the school.*]

BEATRIX.

Dennis—make Cam bring you home.

[*She joins MISS BRENT and LUCIAN, and gradually they all three disappear.*]

CAMILLA.

Oh, Dennis! And is this all you have done?

DENNIS.

All.

CAMILLA.

Horrible!

DENNIS.

You mean I've declined in the social scale?

CAMILLA.

Hah!

DENNIS.

Oh, yes, I admit I'm accustomed to polite society. I was once dependent upon a lady who fed me, clothed me, kept me, for longer than I care to reckon. But she knows that I've reached my proper level—I refer you to her for my character.

CAMILLA.

Ah, I am acquainted with the young woman you speak of. She is a person of few ideas, but one of them—a nice discernment of the difference between *true* pride and *false*—might commend itself to you.

DENNIS.

False pride ?

CAMILLA.

Yes. And she has already furnished me with your character. In the mind of this young woman you are a melancholy example of that race of beings who, having wronged themselves, behave with all the dignity and resignation of a child with a torn pinafore: who abandon friends when friends cease to be blind to foibles and follies; and who plant upon their man's estate a solitary, ungainly tree—Pride, unreasoning, undignified, and, she thinks, heartless Pride!

[She turns from him.]

DENNIS.

[Gently.] Miss Brent. *[She looks at him quickly, then turns away again.]* A woman can always make a man appear a fool, and to defend himself from her—especially when she's really good and generous—is like using a stick. So I've nothing to answer, only—you are a little hard to please, Lady Bountiful.

CAMILLA.

You think I am inconsistent. Of course, I did urge you to work.

DENNIS.

Yes.

CAMILLA.

But this uncomfortable enthusiasm is—is appalling !
I couldn't suggest your living in such dreadful
surroundings, and with such people.

DENNIS.

Oh, you mustn't speak against them, please !

*[He stands leaning upon the chair with a set
expression on his face.]*

CAMILLA.

I beg your pardon ; I'm sure they're very nice in
their way, but—Dennis—listen to my proposal. We
always quarrel—let us quarrel under more genial
circumstances. Fauncourt is still open house, and
remains so for some months——

DENNIS.

Oh, no !

CAMILLA.

Wait—you are so hasty ! We—I owe you some
reparation. Give me an opportunity of making it.

DENNIS.

Reparation !

CAMILLA.

For never truly understanding you—for under-
rating you. Ah, it is only my tongue that is shrewish,
and now even that says—I am sorry.

DENNIS.

Camilla !

CAMILLA.

Dennis, I fear I have never been quite candid with you, and—since you left us—the thought has—distressed me.

DENNIS.

What do you mean?

CAMILLA.

I don't think I told you truthfully why I kept you ignorant of your poverty—and I am a little ashamed.

DENNIS.

But you gave me two reasons——

CAMILLA.

Yes—but they were only half-truths, and two half-truths don't make a whole one. And, Dennis, I have found out lately that, deep down below all other reasons, I delayed telling you the secret of your position because I thought the knowledge of it might send you far out into the world—and Fauncourt was dull—and we couldn't spare you.

[Turning from him, she covers her eyes with her hand for a moment.]

DENNIS.

[Watching her with a look of dismay.] Oh!

CAMILLA.

And so, for everybody's sake, come back to the old house; and there, by our cosy fireside, we will all sit, and plot, and plan out some appropriate career for the truant who has taught us how large, and cold, and cheerless home is without him! Will you, Dennis?

DENNIS.

[*In a low voice.*] I thank you, with all my heart ; but—even if I would come home—it is too late.

CAMILLA.

[*In a whisper.*] Too late ?

DENNIS.

Yes—it is too late.

MARGARET.

[*Calling outside.*] Dennis ! Dennis !

[CAMILLA and DENNIS look straight at each other for a moment, then she quickly draws away in agitation.]

RODERICK HERON enters, followed by VEALE and MRS. VEALE, while DENNIS goes out.

RODERICK HERON.

My dear niece, you have discovered our little secret in the strangest way ! Dennis wouldn't let me tell you, he really wouldn't. It's his fault ; I hate concealment, you know. Eh ?

CAMILLA.

[*Faintly.*] Find—Aunt Anne !

DENNIS returns with MARGARET ; MISS BRENT, who follows, exchanges a word with RODERICK and goes straight to CAMILLA. LUCIAN and BEATRIX enter after MISS BRENT.

DENNIS.

[*Falteringly.*] Camilla—this is Margaret, the daughter of my good friends, Mr. and Mrs. Veale. I want to tell you all that Margaret has promised to be—my wife.

[*There is a moment of silent surprise.*

CAMILLA.

[*Looking at MARGARET and advancing to her steadily.*]
I am Camilla Brent, Mr. Dennis Heron's cousin.
[*Taking MARGARET's hand.*] Let me——

[*She falters, turns to MISS BRENT, and
leaning upon her arm walks to the door,
followed by LUCIAN and BEATRIX.*]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

.23 minutes

THE THIRD ACT

MARGARET PREPARES FOR HER VOYAGE

The scene is a humble room in the basement of a house in a poor street in Westminster. The windows look out into the area, whence a flight of steps leads up to the pavement, which together with the area railings are plainly seen from the room. An open door leads into the scullery, through which the area is reached. The room is poorly furnished, the fire is lighted, a baby sleeps in its cradle on the floor. Eighteen months have passed since the events of the previous act.

It is a bright summer morning; a barrel-organ is playing in the street. MRS. VEALE, looking grey and careworn, is at work in the scullery. She peeps into the room and listens.

MRS. VEALE.

Did I hear our little 'un? [*She crosses quietly to the cradle and kneels beside it, looking into it and arranging the coverlet.*] Ha! Do you know why the music's playing this fine morning, my precious? It's because mother's coming down to-day. That's what the music tells us! Mother's coming downstairs this blessed morning! Grandpa! [*She sees JOHN VEALE slowly descending the area steps, and goes to*

meet him as he enters through the scullery, carrying a brown paper parcel. He is much altered—his hair is white, his step feeble, and his manner that of a broken-down man.] Father dear, I thought you'd got lost.

VEALE.

Did you, 'Etty?

MRS. VEALE.

[*Taking his hat, stick, and comforter from him.*] I shan't send you out on any more errands if you keep me on pins and needles.

VEALE.

There was so many crossin's, mother; I'm not what I was in traffic. [*Giving her the parcel.*] The young man at the draper's says this is all the rage just now—two-and-eleven-pence-ha'penny.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Opening the parcel and finding a common woollen shawl, which she shakes out and puts round her shoulders.*] Capital!

VEALE.

Just suits you, 'Etty.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Taking off the shawl.*] As if it was for me! It's for Meg.

VEALE.

Meg—oh, aye.

MRS. VEALE.

Dennis is going to carry Meg downstairs when he comes home to dinner.

VEALE.

Lor' bless my soul! Is he? Ha! ha! It'll seem like old times—our Meg running about again.

MRS. VEALE.

Don't, father! It'll be a long while before we see Meg looking much like our Meg. Why, John dear, you forget everything nowadays. Meg's been eight weeks upstairs.

VEALE.

Oh, aye—time flies. It's a year since my bankruptcy; I reck'lect that—I reck'lect that.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Looking towards the cradle.*] Yes, father, the little gal's eight weeks old to-day at tea-time—but she hasn't been lying nearly so still and quiet as her mother has. Meg!

[*She goes to the fireplace and arranges the shawl over the back of the armchair, which she turns towards the fire.*]

VEALE.

[*Mumbling to himself.*] Meg comin' down! It'll all seem like old times afore the bankruptcy. It'll all seem like old times—afore the baby was—afore the baby was—made a bankrupt—made a bankrupt—made a bankrupt.

AMELIA enters, carrying a tray with breakfast-things upon it. She has become wizen and slatternly.

AMELIA.

Please, m'm, ole Mr. 'Eron—he 'aven't touch his breakfast agin.

MRS. VEALE.

What's wrong now ?

VEALE.

Mr. 'Eron—one of the affablest gentlemen we've ever known !

AMELIA.

I'm not wishful to repeat sech language, m'm, but Mr. 'Eron 'ave been calling his meal by low names.

MRS. VEALE.

No, 'Melia.

AMELIA.

He says 'is toast is a injury and 'is kawfee a insult.

[AMELIA retires to the scullery.]

MRS. VEALE.

John, I can't endure that heartless old man much longer ! He's wearing me out !

VEALE.

You don't understand Mr. 'Eron, 'Etty, my dear.

MRS. VEALE.

Don't understand ! Why the old man's no more than we are now, and ought to be much less ! We give him the cream of everything—the bedroom with the new wall-paper, the quilt I was married with ! 'Melia valets him and keeps him repaired, and I scorch my eyes out cooking him luxuries ! And how does he treat us ? It's wicked !

VEALE.

Ah, I dessay Mr. 'Eron feels his fall in the world worse than we do, 'Etty. It's a shockin' reverse for a born gentleman. [*Taking a spoon from the tray.*] Look 'ere! A metal spoon for a born gentleman. There's a reverse!

MRS. VEALE.

A gentleman! Who led us into all the mischief that finished up in the Bankruptcy Court with an old judge—whose face I could a' slapped—asking you impudent questions?

VEALE.

[*Mournfully.*] I know, 'Etty, I know.

MRS. VEALE.

And still you're proud of being patronised, and slapped on the back, by a "gentleman"! You're not yourself, father, or I'd be ashamed of you.

VEALE.

But Mr. 'Eron has explained everything in his own affable way—the friendliest gentleman we've ever known.

MRS. VEALE.

He'd explain the pattern of my gown.

VEALE.

He's been forsook by his proud relations, and put in the hands of their lawyers, and now [*looking at the spoon*] his own son don't give him a bit o' silver to stir his tea with!

[*The music of the street-organ is heard again.*]

MRS. VEALE.

His own son! Ah, poor Dennis! He's got enough to bear, with all us sparrows chirruping for bread-crumbs! Come, I won't grumble at my share o' the burden! [*Seizing the poker vigorously and mending the fire.*] I'll think about the old vagabond's dinner, that I will!

AMELIA.

[*Entering the room from the scullery.*] I'm ready for baby, m'm.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Taking the baby from the cradle and placing it in AMELIA'S arms.*] Be careful, 'Melia!

AMELIA.

[*Tenderly.*] Lor', m'm, I'm used to it. There's two at 'ome I've reared.

RODERICK HERON *enters.* *There is a faded and rather depressed air about him, but his manner towards the VEALES is magnificent and condescending. He stalks across to the fireplace.*

RODERICK HERON.

Veale, my dear fellow—the paper.

[AMELIA goes out with the baby.

VEALE.

It's Mr. 'Eron! Good mornin', sir—a fine and pleasant mornin' to you, Mr. 'Eron. [*Taking the newspaper from the top of the bureau and cutting it.*]

[RODERICK removes the woollen shawl from the back of the chair and throws it away, then seats himself, facing the fire.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Picking up the shawl indignantly and placing it on a chair.*] Ah!

RODERICK HERON.

Oh, my good woman, I've eaten no breakfast, you know. I'm quite faint—I really am.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Repressing her anger.*] We must get you something tempting for your dinner, sir.

RODERICK HERON.

I'm glad you feel the necessity for a step of that kind. I suggest a small bird of some sort—a pigeon, for example. With a sauce—try a sauce, Mrs. Veale.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Twitching her hands.*] A sauce.

RODERICK HERON.

But, for Heaven's sake, don't invent it! Buy a cookery book when you go out. I'll open my purse-strings and make you a present of one. Ask Dennis for the money. [VEALE gives RODERICK HERON the paper.] Thank you, Veale—you are exceedingly attentive. I hope you know that I consider you exceedingly attentive.

VEALE.

Much obliged to ye, Mr. 'Eron, I'm sure.

MRS. VEALE.

Have you heard that Meg comes down to-day, Mr. Heron?

RODERICK HERON.

[*Reading the paper with his back to the fire condescendingly.*] Does she? Now I'm rejoiced to hear that—quite rejoiced, you know.

MRS. VEALE.

Ah, thank you, sir.

RODERICK HERON.

She will be able to assist in the household duties.

MRS. VEALE.

What!

RODERICK HERON.

I have lost all confidence in Amelia since I detected her using my comb. You are well-intentioned, Mrs. Veale; but Margaret can now make me her special study.

MRS. VEALE.

Mr. Heron, while my gal has been lying upstairs, watched, on and off, by me and Dennis, there's been one belief that's kep' me, in a sort o' way, cheerful, sir.

RODERICK HERON.

Indeed, indeed?

MRS. VEALE.

The belief that it couldn't be meant to snatch at the young and pretty under this roof and leave the old and selfish untouched.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Looking at VEALE.*] Ah, and a very cruel thing to say before your poor husband, Mrs. Veale—a very heartless thing! [MRS. VEALE, *with a look of indignation, goes into the scullery, carrying the tray.*] Veale, have you any money in your pocket?

VEALE.

[*Fumbling in his pockets.*] A little change of mother's, sir.

RODERICK HERON.

Buy me a bunch of primroses when you go out, Margaret will be gratified by some attention from me on her coming downstairs, you know. I try to think of everybody.

AMELIA, *dressed for walking, enters, weighed down by the baby in its bonnet and robe.* MRS. VEALE *returns to the room.*

AMELIA.

[*To MRS. VEALE.*] Master's come in, m'm; he's run upstairs to the young missus.

MRS. VEALE.

It's early for Dennis; he's so excited about Meg.

RODERICK HERON.

I really hope he is not neglecting those disgusting stables of his. The business of a Jobmaster is painfully degrading, but when a young man has responsibilities——

MRS. VEALE.

[*Attiring VEALE in his hat, gloves, and comforter.*] Here's your hat, father. Go into the Park with 'Melia and sit in the sun. [*The music of the street-organ is resumed.* AMELIA *goes out, and ascends the area-steps, followed by VEALE. Watching their departure from the area, and calling after them.*] Don't look about you, 'Melia! John, hold on to 'Melia's jacket at the crossings! [*A letter is handed to her through the railings.*] Good morning, postman. [*Returning to the room and throwing the letter on to the table.*] Letter for you, Mr. Heron. [*She retires to the scullery.*

RODERICK HERON.

Eh? Oh! [*Taking up the letter.*] Camilla's lawyers! [*Opening the letter.*] No enclosure. Really, you know, this is infamous! [*Reading.*] "Great George Street, Westminster. Sir. Yourself and Miss Camilla Brent. In answer to your further communication, we are again compelled to inform you that we can do nothing but act upon the positive instructions of Miss Camilla Brent and her advisers given us previous to her leaving England a year ago." Now, how deceived we have all been in this young woman! "The large sum of money then paid you by Miss Camilla Brent, to enable you to discharge your obligations to Mr. John Veale, was a final gift on the part of our client, and we regret to find that it was misapplied." Really, you know, this is libellous! "It is, of course, open to you to directly address Miss Camilla Brent——" Ah! "But as that lady is moving about Europe, we are ourselves unacquainted with her precise whereabouts." Oh! "We note your assurance that you are now the sole support of your son and his numerous family connections. "Maule & Craddock."

DENNIS enters quickly, carrying a large bouquet, a basket of fruit, and a parcel of books. RODERICK HERON shuffles his letter into his pocket, as MRS. VEALE also enters.

DENNIS.

Good morning, father!

MRS. VEALE.

Ah, Dennis, my dear!

RODERICK HERON.

You neglect your employment at a very critical hour of the day, Dennis.

DENNIS.

I'm of no use at the Mews this morning! Meg is coming downstairs! [*Showing the flowers.*] Look here, father!

RODERICK HERON.

For your wife, I presume?

DENNIS.

Yes. Aren't they beautiful? [*To MRS. VEALE.*] Put 'em in the gayest jug we have. [*MRS. VEALE takes the flowers and retires to the scullery. Selecting a bunch of grapes from the basket and holding it up.*] There's a picture!

RODERICK HERON.

I'm always grieved to see extravagance, you know. Grapes at this season of the year—for your wife; it's a little painful to me.

DENNIS.

Extravagance! Extravagance! Meg is coming down to day! [*Handing the parcel of books to RODERICK.*] Here, father—some new books.

RODERICK HERON.

Ah, dear Dennis, that's thoughtful—now that's really thoughtful.

DENNIS.

Spread 'em all out on the table.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Tucking the parcel under his arm.*] No, no, I won't unpack 'em here.

DENNIS.

Yes, yes. Let her catch sight of the bright covers directly I carry her into the room.

[*DENNIS goes up to the scullery-door and gives the fruit to MRS. VEALE.*

RODERICK HERON.

[*To himself.*] Meg! Pish! [*Throwing the books on the table.*] Really, you know!

[*In disgust, he sits reading his paper. DENNIS wheels down a big armchair and arranges it beside the table.*

DENNIS.

Just the thing! Not too near the fire—out of the draught.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Returning with the flowers in a jug.*] Look at this fine yellow rose! It's Meg's pet flower.

DENNIS.

Ha, ha! of course it is. [*Turning the jug.*] We'll turn it this way, mother, so that, when she sits here, the big yellow chap stares her in the face. There!

[*He opens the parcel of books; he and MRS. VEALE arrange them about the table.*]

MRS. VEALE.

How splendid! [*Examining the books.*] Dennis.

DENNIS.

Eh?

MRS. VEALE.

There's no pictures in 'em !

DENNIS.

Don't you think—Meg will—care for 'em—without——?

MRS. VEALE.

Why, Dennis, you know her taste in reading by this time.

DENNIS.

I—I quite forgot.

MRS. VEALE.

Never mind ! Come and set out that fruit.

[They go together into the scullery.]

RODERICK HERON.

The soot is falling here ; I am half smothered, you know. Phew ! *[He rises, and crosses to the table.]* Ugh ! I had better rejoice with the rest of 'em. *[Sinking into the armchair comfortably.]* Now, I suppose, to a girl of her class these domestic events are as bank-holidays to a common young man. But confound her and her baby !

[He selects the yellow rose from the bouquet and fastens it in his coat. MRS. VEALE comes to the table with the fruit in a dish. DENNIS picks up the hassock and places it on the floor by the armchair ; RODERICK puts his feet on it. DENNIS and MRS. VEALE stare at RODERICK blankly.]

RODERICK HERON.

[*Gaily, pointing to the rose in his coat.*] You see!
You see!

DENNIS.

Why, father, you——!

RODERICK HERON.

Dear Dennis, I decorate in honour of the occasion.

[*DENNIS walks away.*]

MRS. VEALE.

[*Follows him sympathetically.*] Don't be down, Dennis! Cheer up! He's a well-meaning gentleman, your father.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Taking some grapes from the dish and munching them complacently.*] Towards all these pretty family celebrations I am really sympathetic—quite sympathetic, you know.

MRS. VEALE.

Dennis, my dear, don't you think this is a capital opportunity to—let him know?

DENNIS.

[*In a whisper.*] To tell him——?

MRS. VEALE.

About the future—now.

[*DENNIS, taking an auctioneer's catalogue from his pocket, advances to RODERICK.*]

DENNIS.

Father, there's some important news I want to break to you. [*Giving him the catalogue.*] Perhaps you'd better glance over that.

RODERICK HERON.

Certainly, dear Dennis, certainly.

DENNIS.

I've kept it from you till the matter was quite settled; there's no good, that I can see, in arguing about what's got to be.

RODERICK HERON.

Good gracious. [*Reading the catalogue.*] Without any reserve! Saturday the 11th! Messrs. Chepmell have instructions to dispose of—Horses, carts, carriages—general stock of a Livery Stable! Proprietor leaving England! On view after Wednesday! [*To DENNIS.*] You really don't suggest that this refers to your, I may say *our*, business?

DENNIS.

Yes, father, I do.

RODERICK HERON.

Proprietor leaving—no, dear Dennis, no!

DENNIS.

Proprietor leaving England. It might have said that he hopes to do it in a week's time, and that he's going to the shipping agent this very day.

RODERICK HERON.

Proprietor leaving Eng ? Alone.

DENNIS.

Alone ! [*Laying his hand on MRS. VEALE'S shoulder—she looking up at him kindly.*] Alone—no. Mr. and Mrs. Veale go with me. Meg—my wife—and our little girl go with me. Please Heaven, health and good fortune go with us all !

RODERICK HERON.

[*Taking up an important position before the fire.*] Really, Dennis, I am almost ashamed that such a question should arise—nay, that it should be absolutely vital—but what arrangements do you propose with reference to myself, you know ?

DENNIS.

Well, we are willing you should share the rough and the smooth with us.

RODERICK HERON.

The rough !

DENNIS.

I'm content to work for you, as I do now, father ; and those about me will do their best to make you happy.

MRS. VEALE.

Yes, that we will !

RODERICK HERON.

[*Waving her away.*] One moment, Mrs. Veale—please, please ! This is purely a private matter. [*MRS. VEALE goes to the window. Sulkily to DENNIS.*] Where the devil are we going ?

DENNIS.

A good friend—Mr. Ericson—a rich American, who's had dealings with me and taken a liking to me, owns a large cattle-farm out in Nebraska.

RODERICK HERON.

Great powers, cattle !

DENNIS.

And he has an idea that I'm the man to manage it. By Jove, I'm the man to try !

RODERICK HERON.

Nebraska ! I demand to know what has induced you to commit yourself to—to—to this most inconvenient scheme !

DENNIS.

I'll tell you. The chance of some day finding myself able to restore ease and comfort to the two old people we ruined by our coming amongst 'em. The prospect of taking my wife out of the drudgery and meanness of this sort of life, and seeing the colour come back to her face and the strength to her poor little body ! And the hope of watching our child grow up to be a woman among sturdy, independent people who won't let her feel ashamed of a rough, grey-haired father ! If it all comes to pass, why—I—why—— Ah, if it only comes to pass !

[He breaks down a little and sits leaning his head upon his hand.]

MRS. VEALE.

[Coming to him and touching his shoulder, soothingly.]
Dennis !

RODERICK HERON.

[*To himself reflectively*]. After all, there are gentlemen farmers! And it may move Camilla to a sense of duty. [*To DENNIS*.] I begin to feel sympathetic towards this scheme, dear Dennis—quite sympathetic, you know. [*AMELIA, carrying the baby, is seen descending the area-steps quickly, followed by JOHN*.

AMELIA.

[*Outside excitedly*.] Oh, m'm! Oh, m'm! If you please, m'm.

MRS. VEALE.

Why, here's 'Melia back! and father! [*She hurries to the door and admits AMELIA and VEALE*.] Gracious, 'Melia! whatever has happened?

AMELIA.

[*Breathlessly*.] Oh, m'm, if you'd 'old baby till I git my breath! [*Coming down*.] We 'ave 'erried along, me and Mr. Veale.

MRS. VEALE.

[*Taking the baby*.] Sit down a minute, 'Melia. Father, what is it?

VEALE.

'Melia'll tell you, 'Etty, my dear. I'm reether blown, mother.

[*AMELIA sinks into a chair with her hand to her heart*.

AMELIA.

Me and Mr. Veale, m'm, went straight up Little Cowper Street, bein' the nearest way to the Park gate, and along Peel Row, and no one could a' been carefuller o' cabs and busses than me, 'oldin' baby in one arm as I did and leadin' Mr. Veale by the other 'and, my jacket not being one to place confidence in.

MRS. VEALE.

Well, 'Melia ?

AMELIA.

Well, m'm, jest as we was crossin' of Great George Street, bein' wishful to shift baby from my lef' to my right, I let go Mr. Veale and I see 'im stragglin' across the road for all the world as if he was goin' under a milk-cart.

MRS. VEALE.

Father !

AMELIA.

So I gives a shriek and calls out, " Mr. Veale ! come to 'Melia ! Mr. Veale ! " and at that very moment a lady and gentleman walks straight out of a 'ouse in George Street, and the lady lays 'old o' me and says, " Did you say Mr. Veale, child ? " and not bein' wishful to tell a untruth I owned it.

MRS. VEALE.

A lady and gentleman !

AMELIA

Yes, m'm, a old gentleman with as nice a way with 'im as I'm wishful to see, and a young lady with sech eyes and 'air and teeth. And I reckernised her, m'm —ah, I reckernised her the minute I see her !

MRS. VEALE.

You recognised her, 'Melia !

AMELIA.

Yes, m'm—the young lady who came one day along of others to the Ridin' Academy.

MRS. VEALE.

Why, Dennis !

RODERICK HERON.

Really, you know, this is very interesting ! Dennis !
[DENNIS turns his back upon the group and walks slowly away, then stands, with his head bowed, listening.] Go on, my good girl, go on !

AMELIA.

Well, m'm, and when the young lady found out who Mr. Veale was she gives a sharp look at baby and she says, says she, "Tell me this child's name," she says, "quick !" "She ain't christened yet," I says, "her mother 'avin been at death's door ; but it will be—if we all live—" I says, "it will be Margaret." And then she looks at me in a sort o' startled way and says, "Margaret—Heron ?" she says. And I jest nodded. And, oh, m'm, it was sweet the way she be'aved towards baby.

RODERICK HERON.

Why, why, why, why ?

AMELIA.

She jest lifts baby's veil, m'm, as careful as if the child was made o' gold, and she looks in its face and stares at it without seemin' to breathe. And then I see a big tear creepin' down her cheek, and she brushed it away with her 'and, but another come too quick for her and fell on baby's robe. And then she turned away and whispered to the old gentleman, and he gives her a gold pencil and a leaf out of his pocket-book, and she writes on it ; and I see her 'and all shakin' and tremblin', m'm, as she pinned the paper on to baby's frock—jest 'ere. Look, m'm !

[AMELIA turns back the baby's robe, showing a scrap of paper pinned to the frock.]

MRS. VEALE.

[*Looking round towards DENNIS.*] Dennis.

RODERICK HERON.

[*Gaily.*] Dennis, my dear boy! [*DENNIS coming slowly down and, bending over the baby, reads in a low voice.*] "The child carries this message to its mother, asking her not to refuse to see Camilla Brent."

[*There is a knock at the door. AMELIA opens it, and SIR RICHARD PHILLITER is seen on the threshold.*

SIR RICHARD.

The person living on the floor above has been good enough to admit me. Mr. Dennis Heron?

MRS. VEALE.

Come in, sir—do, pray.

SIR RICHARD.

Thank you. [*Advancing to DENNIS and taking his hand warmly.*] My dear Dennis, how do you do?

DENNIS.

Sir Richard.

RODERICK HERON.

Now, this is really a delightful visit—a gratifying visit, you know.

[*DENNIS makes way for RODERICK, who advances to PHILLITER, but the latter bows stiffly and does not accept RODERICK's hand.*

SIR RICHARD.

[*Turning to the flowers on the table.*] Dennis, what bright and cheerful flowers!

RODERICK HERON.

Quite so.

MRS. VEALE.

[*In a whisper.*] John! 'Melia!

[MRS. VEALE, *carrying the baby, withdraws quietly, followed by AMELIA and VEALE.*

RODERICK HERON.

Dear Dennis, pray entertain Sir Richard while I smoke my cigarette in the—ah—in the little front garden. This is really a memorable meeting, you know. [*As he goes out.*] Where the devil is Camilla?

[*He goes into the area, where he is seen walking to and fro, smoking.*

SIR RICHARD.

Well, Dennis, my dear fellow! "Confound him!" you're saying to yourself, "what's he doing here?"

DENNIS.

No, no—indeed.

SIR RICHARD.

How well you're looking! I ought to tell you—Camilla returned suddenly to England, for a few hours, last night and, finding I was free, sent me a line begging me to escort her to her lawyers this morning, and as we were leaving Maule & Craddock's we fell upon your little maid and the baby, and heard of your wife's grave illness. All right now, eh?

DENNIS.

Yes, thank God!

SIR RICHARD.

Good—good. But you know what women are. Directly Camilla learnt the facts she said to me, “Richard—” I’ve taught her to call me Richard, at last—“Richard, I know that Dennis has grown away from his old friends and companions, and that he and I have become strangers; but his wife has been lying at the point of death, and I must—I must nurse that baby!” [DENNIS turns slightly away from PHILLITER.] And this accounts for my shameless intrusion.

DENNIS.

And—where—is Camilla—now?

SIR RICHARD.

Camilla? Oh, Camilla is upstairs, with Mrs. Heron.

DENNIS.

She is—very good. She was—always—very good.

[He stands looking into the fire.]

SIR RICHARD.

[To himself, eyeing DENNIS.] There are different kinds of heroes; the hero who bangs a drum, or waves a flag, or spouts, or bullies, or prays to God, with a newspaper reporter at his back—and there’s another sort. This man is of the other sort.

CAMILLA enters noiselessly, carrying the baby, divested of its bonnet and robe.

CAMILLA.

[Softly.] Dennis. [DENNIS turns and advances towards her, looking down upon the baby.] Hush!

[Going down on her knees, she places the baby in its cradle. The two men watch her.]

SIR RICHARD.

[*In an undertone, laying his hand on DENNIS's arm.*]
Bless me! Dennis, I've seen her, a little child, playing
with her doll—like that.

[*RODERICK looks in at the window, then
hastily enters.*]

RODERICK HERON.

My dear niece!

[*CAMILLA rises quickly and confronts him
with an altered manner.*]

CAMILLA.

Uncle!

RODERICK HERON.

Now this is an affecting family reunion—it really is!

CAMILLA.

Uncle Roderick, I am here to see Dennis and his
wife and child. It may be years before they and I
meet again—we may never meet again. But, for all
that, I will go out of this house without another word
if you do not leave this room at once.

RODERICK HERON.

I think I understand, Camilla. I am the victim of
tale-bearing, of false report. I had hoped, you know,
for a general exchange of toleration and forgiveness
—but I am mistaken. [*Loftily.*] I am mistaken in
you, my sister's child—Ah! And I am mistaken, I
regret to find, in Dennis. It's a terrible shock—really
a terrible shock—to me to realise that in every action
of his life, in the selection of his associates, in the
choice of a career, my son has been actuated solely by
considerations of self. [*Opening the door.*] I shall
remain upstairs—the front room on the second floor,
you know.

[*He goes out.*]

CAMILLA.

[*Gently, to DENNIS.*] Never mind. She is ready—fetch her. [DENNIS *nods to CAMILLA and silently goes out. As he disappears, CAMILLA puts her handkerchief to her eyes.*] Oh, dear! oh, dear! How poor they are! How poor they are!

SIR RICHARD.

Don't, Camilla, pray don't!

CAMILLA.

Richard.

SIR RICHARD.

My dear?

CAMILLA.

[*With little stifled sobs.*] You—you—do-n't think I've wronged—Uncle Roderick, do you?

SIR RICHARD.

Wronged him!

CAMILLA.

I'm not clever at analysing character. Richard, do you believe Uncle Roderick *knows* he's so shockingly wicked?

SIR RICHARD.

No.

CAMILLA.

Oh! then what have I done?

SIR RICHARD.

No, I don't think he knows he's a scoundrel—but I imagine he half suspects it.

CAMILLA.

Ah, thank you. Richard, poor Dennis is leaving England, to farm, in America.

SIR RICHARD.

Bless me! By himself?

CAMILLA.

No—with everybody belonging to him. They're enough to found a colony.

SIR RICHARD.

Yes—they might start the jail with Roderick.

CAMILLA.

Hrs. Heron tells me that Dennis is going to the shipping agent to-day. Richard, do something for me.

SIR RICHARD.

My dear child.

CAMILLA.

Make some excuse for taking him there at once, find out the name of the vessel, and then we'll enter into an underhand arrangement with the agent for their comfort—shall we?

SIR RICHARD.

Even for Roderick's comfort?

CAMILLA.

Yes. Even—Uncle—Roderick.

SIR RICHARD.

Ah, bless you, Lady Bountiful!

MARGARET.

[*Outside, calling softly.*] Miss Brent! Miss Brent!

CAMILLA.

That's Mrs. Heron. [*She runs to the door and throws it open.*] Mrs. Heron.

VEALE enters, looking behind him.

VEALE.

[*With feeble gaiety.*] Meg coming down—seems like old times—afore the bankruptcy!

DENNIS enters, carrying MARGARET, who looks pale and fragile. He puts her in the armchair, and arranges the hassock and shawl, while MR. and MRS. VEALE look on.

MARGARET.

[*Smiling.*] Ah, Miss Brent, ain't I silly not to run downstairs? [*Seeing the flowers.*] Oh! [*She passes her hand over the blossoms, then picks up one of the books, looking up into his face gratefully.*] Dennis!

CAMILLA.

[*Advancing with PHILLITER.*] Mrs. Heron, this is my friend, Sir Richard Philliter.

MARGARET.

[*Timidly.*] How do you do, sir?

SIR RICHARD.

[*Taking MARGARET's hand.*] Mrs. Heron, there is no one, apart from your own family, more rejoiced to see you recovered. And such a fine boy!

CAMILLA.

[*Quietly to him.*] Girl.

SIR RICHARD.

Girl. [*A little disconcerted.*] Ah![*He goes to DENNIS.*]

MRS. VEALE.

[*To MARGARET.*] Father and me won't be long doing our shopping, Meg. Come along, John.

VEALE.

Seems like old times—afore the——

MRS. VEALE.

Hush, father! Here's your hat.

[*JOHN and MRS. VEALE go out and ascend the area-steps.*]

CAMILLA.

[*Quietly to PHILLITER.*] Now!

SIR RICHARD.

Dennis, I know you've some business out of doors. I think we can be spared for a little while. My cab's outside.

CAMILLA.

[*Removing her hat.*] Go, go, go—I'll take care of Mrs. Heron.

DENNIS.

Meg?

MARGARET.

[*Softly to him.*] I want to speak to Miss Brent with nobody by. Go to the shipping-office, and find out—the day.

DENNIS.

It's a long voyage for you, Meg.

MARGARET.

I'm ready.

DENNIS.

With hope—ah, but with uncertainty at the end of it.

MARGARET.

I'm ready.

*[DENNIS and PHILLITER go out together.]**MARGARET turns, and watches their going.*

CAMILLA.

How courageous of those two men to leave us together. Three wicked gossips! *[Placing her chair by MARGARET.]* You, I *[looking towards the cradle]*, and that little magpie in her nest.

MARGARET.

[In a low voice.] Miss Brent.

CAMILLA.

Yes?

MARGARET.

Sick folks are always humoured and spoilt. Will you stand over there, away from me, and let me look at you well?

CAMILLA.

Of course I will. Here?

MARGARET.

There. *[Looking eagerly at CAMILLA.]* I'm going to stare at you, to take you into my memory—your face, your dress, your ways—may I?

CAMILLA.

Certainly.

[*After a little while MARGARET looks away, passing her hand over her eyes with a sigh.*]

MARGARET.

Ah!

CAMILLA.

Well?

MARGARET.

Do you wonder why I'm trying to get you by heart?

CAMILLA.

To remember me kindly?

MARGARET.

Ah, yes—yes. I'll tell you. Miss Brent!

CAMILLA.

[*Sitting beside her.*] Hush! What's the matter?

MARGARET.

Miss Brent, I know—I've known for ever so long—that you and Dennis loved each other. [CAMILLA *shrinks from her.*] Don't go away from me. I'm not jealous any longer.

CAMILLA.

Jealous!

MARGARET.

Perhaps if I'd known you always as I do now I might have been spared the agony of that sort o' feeling. For, oh, it was strong on me at first! It was bitter to me at first!

CAMILLA.

I—I mustn't deny it. It is true, Dennis and I were attached to each other once, in a strange kind of way. Who—who told you?

MARGARET.

Mr. Roderick Heron told me.

CAMILLA.

[*With indignation.*] Mr. Heron!

MARGARET.

It was one day, when the crash first came at home, and I reproached Mr. Heron with what he'd done for us—and he turned on me and let me have the truth.

CAMILLA.

And what was his notion of the truth?

MARGARET.

[*Her hands clasped, staring straight before her.*] That Dennis missed his chance with you and *picked me up out of pity.*

CAMILLA.

Oh!

[CAMILLA is about to rise—MARGARET stays her.]

MARGARET.

It was the truth! Somehow I knew it was the truth! He might a' told me in softer words, or only half told me—but there it was, Miss Brent, and it came home to me as if I'd been caught by the throat and horse-whipped!

CAMILLA.

Oh, don't speak like that !

MARGARET.

Every kind feeling in me was torn by it and set bleeding. I hated the thought of you ! I hated the sight of him—my husband ! It brought out o' me all the bad qualities that common people have, and I hated myself worst of all !

CAMILLA.

Why didn't you ask Dennis to tell you his story ?

MARGARET.

Oh, he told it me. But what did it seem to me—a jealous, ignorant young wife ? I saw it all so clear, I could a' made a tale out of it ! I saw him leaving your fine house after a lovers' tiff ; I saw how he came to console himself with me, just the sort o' poor thing to deaden a man's trouble for a time ! And I saw why you'd left England before our wedding !

CAMILLA.

[*Faintly.*] What do you mean ?

MARGARET.

It was because you still loved him and wanted to drive him out of your head !

[CAMILLA *rises*—MARGARET *rises with her.*

CAMILLA.

[*With a cry of distress.*] Ah !

MARGARET.

And do you know, do you know what I did when all this came on me ?

CAMILLA.

[*Appealingly.*] Be silent! you are ill!

MARGARET.

I prayed that in some foreign place you'd fall sick, of a fever, and waste under it, that you'd live—live to meet my husband again in England, showing him a plain, altered face to compare with my rosy cheeks and bright eyes! I prayed *that*—God forgive me for it!—and now, look at me! Ah, if I could have seen myself as I was to be, Miss Brent! If I could only have seen myself as I was to be!

[CAMILLA takes her in her arms.

CAMILLA.

Hush! hush! Mrs. Heron, Mrs. Heron! You're all right with me now, aren't you—you're all right with me now?

MARGARET.

Yes, yes. It's all done with now.

[CAMILLA places her tenderly in the chair and kneels by her side.

CAMILLA.

That's right—that's right.

MARGARET.

Ah, but you don't know what a cruel wife I've been to him.

CAMILLA.

Because of *me*? Not because of *me*?

MARGARET.

Yes, I couldn't help it. The thought of you—you, a lady, so much higher than me—used to send me crazy; and for months, while he was struggling hard to keep a roof over us, and when I should a' been cheering and consoling him, I never opened my mouth but to torture him with a taunt or a sneer.

CAMILLA.

Oh! Tell me again it's different now! It's different now, isn't it?

MARGARET.

Oh, yes, Miss Brent, it's different now.

CAMILLA.

I—I'm so glad. I am—so glad!

MARGARET.

Slowly enough, the horrible jealousy seemed to burn itself out [*putting her hand to her bosom*] here. It's his love that's made me a better woman. He's been so good to me, Miss Brent—my husband's been so good to me!

CAMILLA.

Ah, yes.

MARGARET.

Always patient—always tender—seeming not to hear when I've blurted out ignorant things, instead of wincing under 'em—always remembering me in a hundred small ways as if he'd been born to it. And as I've been lying upstairs, through long days and long nights, thinking, and thinking, and thinking, I've come to know him better and to love him truly.

CAMILLA.

Ah, Heaven bless you both! Heaven bless and prosper you both!

MARGARET..

And now, Miss Brent, there's something I want to put on paper and give into your hands before I start on this voyage.

CAMILLA.

Into my hands?

MARGARET.

I've got it by heart. It's come to me, bit by bit, at odd times; and I meant to send it you somehow, before I sailed, never expecting the strange luck of knowing you to talk to. [*Looking towards the bureau.*] I'll get my blotting-book and pen and ink.

CAMILLA.

No, no—let me bring them to you. [*Going to the bureau.*] Are they here?

MARGARET.

Yes.

[*CAMILLA opens the lid of the bureau and takes out a small inkstand and blotting-book. While CAMILLA'S back is turned, MARGARET rises, and stands looking down upon the cradle, thoughtfully.*

CAMILLA.

[*Placing the writing materials upon the table, seeing MARGARET.*] Mrs. Heron! [*Going quickly to MARGARET and looking into her face.*] Mrs. Heron!

MARGARET.

[*In a low, awed voice.*] Miss Brent, the idea's come to me lately that p'rhaps it isn't meant for me to get well and strong again.

CAMILLA.

Oh, hush ! What makes you say that ?

MARGARET.

[*Bending towards the cradle.*] It's my baby that tells me so. I seem to have given all the life I had to my little child.

CAMILLA.

[*In a whisper.*] No, no !

MARGARET.

I dread to frighten mother and Dennis—but often, when my weary fits are on me, I drop into a sort of sleep that isn't *like* sleep. And it makes me think that one day they'll come to wake me, and that they'll find the sleep too heavy, and know they're not to hear me laugh, nor scold, nor see me running about the house any more.

CAMILLA.

These are the sad fancies of a young mother, dear Mrs. Heron.

MARGARET.

P'rhaps—p'rhaps—but still I'm going to give you this letter I've thought of.

CAMILLA.

A letter ?

MARGARET.

Sealed up—addressed to Dennis.

CAMILLA.

Dennis?

MARGARET.

Yes. Because if it should so happen I'm taken away from him, and he wanders back to England some day without me, likely enough you and he'll meet and chat over old times and old faces.

CAMILLA.

But it won't happen!

MARGARET.

Well, just take this letter and keep it by you—it's only a kind word that I dearly want to reach him through you—and, if what I say should come to pass, give it Dennis with your own hands. Promise!

CAMILLA.

When Dennis comes back he'll bring you with him, with all the roses in your cheeks again!

MARGARET.

P'rhaps—but promise what I ask. I'll go away the happier for it. Promise.

CAMILLA.

Yes, yes, I'll promise. But, Mrs. Heron—

MARGARET.

Thank you. I'll write it.

[She sits in the armchair and, opening the blotting-book, finds a sheet of paper and writes. At the same moment DENNIS and PHILLITER are seen coming down the area-steps, talking.]

CAMILLA.

Sir Richard and Dennis have come back !

MARGARET.

Keep 'em away till I've written this. Just a moment—please, Miss Brent !

[CAMILLA goes to the window and opens it.

CAMILLA.

[*Wiping the tears from her eyes—with assumed brightness.*] Richard—Dennis—come and talk to me here. I forbid your coming in.

SIR RICHARD.

Why, what have we done, pray ?

CAMILLA.

Sullied your considerate act of going away by returning a little too soon. Mrs. Heron is writing something—for me—and I won't have her disturbed till it's finished.

DENNIS.

[*Advancing to the window—looking in at MARGARET, fondly.*] By Jove, she looks like her old self again, as she sits there !

CAMILLA.

Take care of her, Dennis.

DENNIS.

Take care of her ! Yes. Why, it puts life into a fellow—only just to see her sitting there. And Dr. Mordaunt says the voyage will work wonders.

CAMILLA.

Of course—of course. Have you been to the shipping agent?

SIR RICHARD.

Yes.

CAMILLA.

Ah! when is it to be?

DENNIS.

Thursday, the 16th—from Liverpool.

CAMILLA.

I sha'n't forget it. I shall think of you all, from among the pines, in my dull little chalet in Switzerland. Tell me the name of the ship.

DENNIS.

The "Orion."

CAMILLA.

The "Orion." Bless the "Orion"!

SIR RICHARD.

Amen!

DENNIS.

Amen!

CAMILLA.

There! I'm forgetting the open window. I'll come out to you. [*Closing the window and going to the door.*] Call me, Mrs. Heron.

[*She joins the two men outside.*

[*MARGARET finishes her letter carefully, then looks over her shoulder to assure herself that she is alone, and reads it.*

MARGARET.

"Dennis. Something tells me that—if—you—lose me—you and Miss Camilla Brent will meet again, and marry. She's the lady whose place I took—and it's only natural—and I've taught myself to think of it without feeling wretched. So I want you to be sure that no shadow of mine comes between you—and that—I wish it." That's all—that's all. [*She encloses the letter in an envelope and seals and addresses it.*] "Mr.—Dennis—Heron. With—my—love." [*Going to the window and tapping at it.*] Miss Brent—Dennis!

CAMILLA, PHILLITER, and DENNIS enter.

DENNIS.

[*To MARGARET.*] Beginning to run before you've learnt to walk. I'll tell Dr. Mordaunt.

MARGARET.

Ah, no tales, and I won't disobey again!

[*DENNIS arranges the chair in its former position. As he does so MARGARET slips her letter into CAMILLA's hand.*]

DENNIS.

Meg, dear. [*Places the shawl around her.*]

MARGARET.

Is it settled?

DENNIS.

A week from to-morrow.

MARGARET.

I am ready.

[*He puts her in the armchair.*]

SIR RICHARD.

And now, as Mrs. Heron looks fatigued it is very lucky that I have to run away with Miss Brent. She has a night journey before her, to Paris. Camilla, Aunt Anne is pacing the room impatiently at the hotel.

CAMILLA.

Yes—I'm forgetting.

SIR RICHARD.

My dear Mrs. Heron, please remember an old friend of your husband's.

MARGARET.

[*Timidly.*] Good-bye, sir.

SIR RICHARD.

I know I shall hear frequently of your health, your happiness, and your welfare in the bright, new country you have chosen. [*Turning to DENNIS, heartily.*] Dennis.

CAMILLA.

[*To MARGARET.*] I shall write to you from Paris, to-morrow. Think of me always, and I'll think much of you.

MARGARET.

Ah, indeed I will.

CAMILLA.

Yes—but whom will you think of?

MARGARET.

Miss Brent.

CAMILLA.

Miss Brent is my aunt. Try again—Meg.

MARGARET.

Camilla.

CAMILLA.

That's right. *[The two women kiss silently.]*

SIR RICHARD.

Camilla, my dear.

CAMILLA.

Yes, yes.

[MARGARET is sitting in deep thought. With a quick movement, CAMILLA, unobserved, takes a simple necklace from her throat and drops it into the cradle.]

CAMILLA.

[Hurriedly.] No, no, we'll not take Dennis from Margaret. Follow me, Richard! No farewells!*[She goes quickly out without looking back.]*

SIR RICHARD.

[Following her, cheerily.] Ha, ha! We always humour her. No farewells, my dear Dennis, no farewells!*[CAMILLA and SIR RICHARD ascend the steps, and disappear.]*

DENNIS.

[Watching their going from the window, then coming down to MARGARET.] They wouldn't let me take 'em to the door—they've run up the steps.

MARGARET.

Fancy, Dennis! A gentleman and a lady going up our poor steps! That's like the fairies who always prefer the chimney. Dennis.

DENNIS.

Yes, Meg!

[He sits beside her.]

MARGARET.

I've made friends with her now, and talked to her. She's a good woman.

DENNIS.

Yes—she's a good woman.

MARGARET.

And, Dennis dear, I—I've told her.

DENNIS.

Told her?

MARGARET.

About my jealousy, and how I once hated her because she'd been your sweetheart.

DENNIS.

There was no need, dear one—there was no need.

MARGARET.

Ah, but there was—because I'm so much easier for it now. She's kissed me, and let me call her Camilla. Camilla. I wonder whether—our child—will ever learn—to love her.

DENNIS.

Why, you shall teach the little one to do that, if you like, Meg.

MARGARET.

[*Leaning back with a sorrowful sigh.*] Ah!

DENNIS.

You're very tired. I must carry you upstairs again.

MARGARET.

Ah, not yet; it's like sending me back to prison. Keep me here a little longer.

DENNIS.

But what will Dr. Mordaunt say?

MARGARET.

He won't mind—will he—if we pay his bill before we leave?

DENNIS.

[*Laughing.*] Ha, ha!

MARGARET.

Ah, now I've made you laugh I know I'll have my own way. Go and smoke your pipe while I shut my eyes and rest.

[*He rises and arranges the shawl about her shoulders.*]

DENNIS.

[*Softly.*] That's a good Meg—a very good Meg!
[*Filling his pipe he bends over the cradle. MARGARET opens her eyes, watching him.*]

MARGARET.

Dennis.

DENNIS.

Yes, Meg!

MARGARET.

[*Beckoning to him with a motion of her head.*] Here! [*He goes to her and stands looking down upon her.*] Dennis dear, suppose—I—never—get well?

DENNIS.

[*Under his breath.*] Meg, dear!

MARGARET.

Suppose, when we reach America, you don't see me bustling about our new home; but, instead o' that, you watch my step getting a little slower every day, and hear my voice growing a little quieter, until—at last—at last——? [*He sinks into a chair beside her, looking at her appealingly.*] Would it be a pity, Dennis—would it be a pity?

DENNIS.

Oh, Meg, Meg!

[*He buries his head in his hands and weeps.*]

MARGARET.

[*Bending towards him fondly.*] Ah, don't, dear, don't! It's cruel to frighten you. I don't want to leave you—indeed I don't. [*Laying her hand upon his head tenderly.*] You've been such a good husband to me, dear—such a good husband.

DENNIS.

No, Meg, no!

MARGARET,

And I—I've taken the heart out of you and made your life a hard one.

DENNIS.

[*Taking her hand and bending over it.*] All good lessons are hard, Meg, and we've had to learn ours.

MARGARET.

Oh, but if I could only make it up to you for the misery I've caused you! If I could only make it up to you!

DENNIS.

There's nothing for you to make up, Meg. We were young people who didn't know each other. And now we've weathered the storm, and we're happy, my dear wife, we're happy.

MARGARET.

Ah, poor Dennis! Kind—forgiving Dennis! [*She lays her head upon his shoulder for a moment, then she looks up, listening.*] Is that Dr. Mordaunt?

[*He goes to the window and looks out.*]

DENNIS.

Not yet.

[*He returns to her. She is leaning back in her chair.*]

MARGARET.

I'll rest now, Dennis—I won't call you any more. Let me see you talking to the child again; I love you to do that—and p'rhaps you'll talk me to sleep.

[*He goes to the cradle, MARGARET lies watching him fondly.*]

DENNIS.

[*In a low voice, but cheerily, to the baby.*] Mother says I'm to talk to you. What shall I tell you? Well, look here! You're going to a new country, you are—do you know that? To a fine, new country, where your mother will soon be a strong mother again. And you've got to spring up into a tall, young woman—mother's companion, mother's right-hand; loving me a little, but thinking and believing that nothing in the world is so good and sweet as your mother is. Ah, you hear that, do you? [*He moves the cradle gently.*] What are you staring at? The clock? That'll tick for us in our new home through many a happy day, please God! [*Raising his head, listening.*] Doesn't it tick, eh? [*In a whisper, wonderingly.*] How loudly it ticks! [*He turns, looking at MARGARET. She is lying in the position in which he left her, but with her eyes closed. He listens to the clock again, then rises and creeps over to MARGARET. Looking into her face in a whisper.*] Meg! Meg, dear! He touches her hand, which lies across the arm of the chair—the hand falls into her lap. He goes back a little, staring at her, then throws himself at her feet with a piteous cry.] Meg! don't leave me like that! don't leave me like that!

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

THE FOURTH ACT

CAMILLA GOES TO THE ALTAR

The scene is the interior of an old country church, with plain stone walls and pillars. The nave is separated from the aisle by three pillars spanned by arches. The church is decorated with flowers. It is late in the afternoon and the light is fading. Five years have passed since the death of MARGARET.

MRS. HODNUTT, a little old woman, dressed in black, enters, and as she does so, PEDGRIFT, a withered, bald-headed old man, ascends the spiral stair which leads from the crypt, carrying a piece of flat ornamental brass which he is anxiously rubbing with a rag.

MRS. HODNUTT.

I didn't know you was in the cyp', Mr. Pedgrift.

PEDGRIFT.

[Glancing at her under his brows.] Ugh! I'm allus at work, Mrs. Hodnutt, ma'am—allus at work.

MRS. HODNUTT.

Tc be sure—on them brasses.

PEDGRIFT.

Aye. I've lighted on some more bits under the rubbidge in the Hethelbert chapel. If I were scholard enough to 'cipher the 'scriptions I could piece 'em together. Lovely brasses! Beautiful brasses?

MRS. HODNUTT.

Can I be of 'elp, Mr. Pedgrift?

PEDGRIFT.

[*Slipping the brass under his coat.*] Nay. I don't require no women folk a' interferin' and reaping my glory. So, 'old 'ee tongue, Mrs. Hodnutt!

MRS. HODNUTT.

[*With asperity.*] Oh, to be sure! [*Turning away and arranging two chairs.*] I wouldn't waste my precious time.

PEDGRIFT.

Waste o' time! In discoverin' and preservin' the splendidest monyments ever set up to mortal men! 'Old 'ee tongue, Mrs. Hodnutt! It's a cheap age we live in, ma'am, and soft stone's good enough for noo folk. But it's brasses what perpetuates the days o' England's greatness, and it's old Pedgrift what perpetuates brasses!

MRS. HODNUTT.

[*Contemptuously.*] Oh, to be sure!

PEDGRIFT.

What are you doin' 'ere at six o'clock in the arternoon, Mrs. Hodnutt?

MRS. HODNUTT.

I'm expectin' Miss Camilly, and her good gentleman as is to be, to step down from th' Grange to view the school-children's flowers.

PEDGRIFT.

I thought the children was to show their decorations to Miss Camilly and th' Grange party at midday?

MRS. HODNUTT.

So they was to, the noisy imps! And, after bringing all their mess and muddle into my church, away comes a groom to say as Miss Camilly's got a sick 'ead but 'opes to stroll down durin' the arternoon. [*Mysteriously.*] A sick 'ead, Mr. Pedgrift! Ah-h-h! to be sure!

PEDGRIFT.

If Miss Camilly gives her mind to a sick 'ead let her enj'y it. You 'old 'ee tongue, Mrs. Hodnutt!

MRS. HODNUTT.

It's a sad sight to see a young ooman ailin' and frettin' the day before the weddin', Mr. Pedgrift.

PEDGRIFT.

[*Polishing and breathing on the brass.*] It's a sad enough sight to see a young 'ooman anyways, 'cepting they be carved on brasses.

MRS. HODNUTT.

Though, to be sure, I guess what's amiss wi' Miss Camilly.

PEDGRIFT.

'Old 'ee tongue, Mrs. Hodnutt!

MRS. HODNUTT.

Not but what Sir Richard's a fine, well-kep' gentleman; but I don't fancy bright eyes and red lips comin' to my church wi' white 'air and wrinkles. He's ripening for sixty, Sir Richard is.

PEDGRIFT.

Aye—time he was thinkin' of his final brasses.

MRS. HODNUTT.

To be sure ! No, Mr. Pedgrift, Miss Camilly missed her match when we lost young Dennis Heron out of Lydgate.

PEDGRIFT.

'Old 'ee tongue, Mrs. Hodnutt.

MRS. HODNUTT.

Many a time I've watched 'em standing together in the Brent pew, both singin' out o' the one book though they'd just knelt on a box full, and I've said to myself, "There's man and wife for ye, and a gay weddin' for St. Eanswythe !" Ah, to be sure, that's the man we ought to a' seen in our old church to-morrow mornin'.

PEDGRIFT.

Aye, Mrs. Hodnutt, and don't 'ee be over certain as 'ow you wont see young Dennis Heron in our church to-morrow marnin'.

MRS. HODNUTT.

Eh ? Why, the young man run away to Lunnon, and then sailed for Ameriky fortune seeking, five year ago, folks say. He's in Ameriky, Samuel Pedgrift.

PEDGRIFT.

Well, he warn't in Ameriky at ha'-past-fower this artnoon.

MRS. HODNUTT.

You've seen 'im ! Here in Lydgate !

PEDGRIFT.

'Old 'ee tongue, Mrs. Hodnutt !

SIR LUCIAN BRENT and BEATRIX enter through the porch. LUCIAN is now a young man with an important manner and a moustache. BEATRIX is a fashionably dressed "grown-up" girl, bright and unaffected.

LUCIAN.

Good afternoon, Mrs. Hodnutt ! Afternoon, Pedgrift !

BEATRIX.

Well, Granny ! Well, Samuel, how are you ?

MRS. HODNUTT.

Good arternoon to you, Sir Looshan ! Bless you, Miss Be'tric !

PEDGRIFT.

[Pushing his brass up his waistcoat.] Arternoon, sir ! Arternoon, miss !

LUCIAN.

My sister and Sir Richard are coming over the meadow——

BEATRIX.

They so want to look at the decorations, Granny Hodnutt. Of course they will see them to-morrow morning ; but that will be different, won't it ? [Looking round.] And is this all the school-children's handiwork ? How delightful !

MRS. HODNUTT.

They 'ad my 'elp, the dear pets—my willin' 'elp.

BEATRIX.

What a terrible disappointment for them, my sister's bad headache this morning! Lucian, see! How charming!

LUCIAN.

[*With dignity.*] Very tasteful. The spread of education among the masses engenders an appreciation of the beautiful.

PEDGRIFT.

[*Edging up to LUCIAN and whispering.*] Sir Looshan, Sir Looshan.

LUCIAN.

Eh?

PEDGRIFT.

[*Producing the brass from beneath his waistcoat.*] I've got some bits o' brasses down below in my cryp'; like this 'ere bit.

LUCIAN.

Indeed?

PEDGRIFT.

If you gave me a 'elpin 'and wi' the Latin that's on 'em I could piece 'em together, Sir Looshan.

LUCIAN.

[*Uncomfortably.*] Latin inscriptions?

PEDGRIFT.

I know you was a college gentleman, Sir Looshan——

LUCIAN.

Exactly—ah—but my Latin, Pedgrift, is *modern* Latin. [*Pointing to the brass.*] That's *old* Latin—different thing altogether. [*LUCIAN walks towards the porch.*]

PEDGRIFT.

[*Disappointed.*] Oh, lor, yah, nah !

BEATRIX.

Granny Hodnutt, do you think Pedgrift would let me have the key of the organ ?

MRS. HODNUTT.

[*Shaking her head negatively.*] Ah-h-h !

BEATRIX.

Oh ! [*She goes to PEDGRIFT.*] Samuel, I *should* like to make friends again with the dear old organ of St. Eanswythe. Lend me the key.

PEDGRIFT.

Nay, nay, Mr. Fletcher don't fancy strange 'ands on the organ.

MRS. HODNUTT.

[*To BEATRIX, who has moved away from PEDGRIFT.*] Bide a bit, missy. [*To PEDGRIFT.*] I want to open the West Door, Mr. Pedgrift.

PEDGRIFT.

[*Still contemplating his brass.*] Yah ! nah !

MRS. HODNUTT.

D'ye hear me, Samuel Pedgrift ?

PEDGRIFT.

[*Taking his bunch of keys and passing them to Mrs. HODNUTT.*] 'Old 'ee tongue, Mrs. Hodnutt !

[*Mrs. HODNUTT selects a key and hands it to BEATRIX with a curtsy.*

BEATRIX.

Dear Granny !

LUCIAN.

[*Looking out through the porch.*] Here are Camilla and Richard.

BEATRIX.

Lucian, come and blow for me.

LUCIAN.

[*With dignity.*] My dear Beatrix ! Really !

[*BEATRIX takes him off, he protesting.*

Mrs. HODNUTT.

Tell me now—do 'ee, Mr. Pedgrift ! Where did ye see Mr. Dennis ?

PEDGRIFT.

Oh, lor ! nah, nah !

Mrs. HODNUTT.

Quick !

PEDGRIFT.

Well, as I was runnin' up to Maister Taplin's, the grocer's, to buy a morsel o' sweet ile to rub my brasses wi', I see the folk wand'r'in' down from railway station.

MRS. HODNUTT.

To be sure!

PEDGRIFT.

And 'mongst 'em I observed Maister Dennis Heron!
'Twas him, changed though he be.

[The sound of the church organ is heard.]

PEDGRIFT.

Why theer's Maister Fletcher come in, on the quiet like.

MRS. HODNUTT.

Pedgrift, some'ow I don't believe th' Grange folks know as Mr. Dennis is in Lydgate. Shall we——?

PEDGRIFT.

[Turning upon her sharply.] Us! You 'old 'ee tongue, Mrs. Hodnutt! Fine folk's business beant *yower* business! Maister Dennis may be goin' to be guest at weddin' to-morrow, or he mayn't! Grange folk may know he's in Lydgate, or they mayn't! Maister Dennis may know Miss Camilly's about to wife Sir Richard, or he mayn't! But don't 'ee be a busybodyin' sort of a elderly woman, Mrs. Hodnutt; and 'old 'ee tongue—d'ye 'ear me?—'old 'ee tongue!

[MRS. HODNUTT and PEDGRIFT separate as MISS BRENT enters, followed by CAMILLA and PHILLITER. They all look older.]

MRS. HODNUTT.

[With many curtseys.] Our duty to you. *[To MISS BRENT.]* And to you, ma'am, and I hope the rheumatics have left you. *[To SIR RICHARD.]* And all good luck to bride and bridegroom—and better late than never to *you*, Sir Richard, if I may pass the compliment.

SIR RICHARD.

[*Laughing.*] Ha, ha! Um—thank you.

MISS BRENT.

You must not talk *too* much this afternoon, Mrs. Hodnutt. My niece's headache has hardly left her. No wonder—the winds are sharp for harvest-time.

[MISS BRENT *goes up the aisle looking at the flowers through her pince-nez.* PEDGRIFT *follows her.*

CAMILLA.

[*To Mrs. Hodnutt.*] I was so miserable at not meeting the children this morning. Were they grieved?

Mrs. Hodnutt.

Ah, the lambs, that they was!

MISS BRENT.

Mrs. Hodnutt!

[Mrs. Hodnutt *goes to* MISS BRENT.]

CAMILLA.

[*Going to the font, then turning to* PHILLITER *with a smile.*] Here I was christened.

SIR RICHARD.

Bless me! [CAMILLA *joins* MISS BRENT *and* Mrs. Hodnutt. SIR RICHARD *goes to the font and examines it closely through his spectacles—to himself.*] My dear Camilla! Here she was christened—actually christened!

[PEDGRIFT *hugging his brass, approaches* SIR RICHARD *stealthily.*

PEDGRIFT.

Your honour—Sir Richard——

SIR RICHARD.

Eh ?

PEDGRIFT.

'Bleege me wi' a private word, sir.

[PEDGRIFT exhibits his piece of brass to PHIL-LITER; they talk in dumb-show. MISS BRENT and MRS. HODNUTT are looking at CAMILLA, who is standing in deep thought, with her hands clasped before her, staring into the chancel. The light of the setting sun illumines CAMILLA's figure.]

MRS. HODNUTT.

[To MISS BRENT.] Look, ma'am! Look 'ee there!

MISS BRENT.

Ah!

MRS. HODNUTT.

She's thinking of to-morrow mornin', ma'am, when she'll stand there, wedded.

MISS BRENT.

My niece will be very happy, Hodnutt.

MRS. HODNUTT.

Most like, ma'am,—but the sun's a-settin' on Miss Camilly. The sun's a-settin' on Miss Camilly.

[MISS BRENT and MRS. HODNUTT, still talking, disappear through porch.]

SIR RICHARD.

[*To PEDGRIFT.*] Bring your brass to me here, Pedgrift—I won't go down into the crypt. One can't be too careful of a cold at my age—at any age.

PEDGRIFT.

[*Going.*] Yes, sir. [*Returning.*] But, your honour—Sir Richard—is your Latin *noo* Latin, or *hold* Latin?

SIR RICHARD.

I fear it is rather *old* Latin, Pedgrift.

PEDGRIFT.

[*Gladly.*] Ah!

[*He disappears down the stairs.* SIR RICHARD
walks over to CAMILLA.

CAMILLA.

Ah, Richard! Do you see the flowers?

SIR RICHARD.

[*Looking into her face.*] Um! Too much of the lily and not enough of the carnation.

CAMILLA.

Now you mean my face. I'm always pale, Richard.

SIR RICHARD.

You are happy, Camilla?

CAMILLA.

Yes. I *ought* to be.

SIR RICHARD.

And not doubtful, eh? Not doubtful?

CAMILLA.

Doubtful?

SIR RICHARD.

About the future, my dear—*our* future.

CAMILLA.

One must be doubtful, however hopeful.

SIR RICHARD.

No, no—no, no.

CAMILLA.

Ah, Richard, a man dies but once, a woman twice—the first time when she marries, and then, as at the last, wondering at the thereafter.

SIR RICHARD.

Then we begin our married life—doubtfully, Camilla?

CAMILLA.

And hopefully—I said that.

SIR RICHARD.

[*Brightening.*] Of course you did, my dear. Hopefully, eh! Hopefully! Hopefully! [*They walk back to the aisle.*] There's but *one* regret.

CAMILLA.

One regret?

SIR RICHARD.

To-morrow might have been six years old to-day, had you willed it so, my dear.

CAMILLA.

You mean——?

SIR RICHARD.

You could have married me more than six years ago, Camilla—six precious years.

CAMILLA.

Ah, it is better now.

SIR RICHARD.

[*Pleased.*] Is it, eh? Is it?

CAMILLA.

Six years ago I did not know——

SIR RICHARD.

Now you're going to say something about my watchful patience, Camilla.

CAMILLA.

Yes.

SIR RICHARD.

And my untiring constancy?

CAMILLA.

Yes.

SIR RICHARD.

And my good heart? And my many other excellent qualities.

CAMILLA.

Yes—yes.

SIR RICHARD.

I knew it! But I won't endure it! It always embarrasses me, my dear, and I can't allow it—so don't, don't!

CAMILLA.

But you like me to *think* you good?

SIR RICHARD.

[*After a moment's pause.*] Yes—I do.

CAMILLA.

And yet never to say it, never to say it?

SIR RICHARD.

Ah, I'll always tell you the truth, my dear—I dearly love to have to stop your saying it.

[*The music of the organ, soft and low, is heard again. The warm glow of sunset now fills the church, but from this moment the light shows the gradual coming of evening.*

CAMILLA.

[*Timidly.*] Richard.

SIR RICHARD.

My dear?

CAMILLA.

There is something I wish to give you—no, to restore to you—while we are alone.

SIR RICHARD.

To restore to me?

CAMILLA.

Something I robbed you of long ago and kept as a memorial of your friendship. [*She takes from her pocket the little volume of Horace seen in the first Act, holding it behind her.*] But now—we are going to be married, and so I pass the little token back to you, thinking you will care to cherish it in recollection of your wife's girlhood. There, Richard!

[*She places the little book in his hands.*

SIR RICHARD.

Dear me! what's this? [*He opens the book at the title-page.*] My Horace!

CAMILLA.

[*Laughingly.*] Horace.

SIR RICHARD.

I knew I'd mislaid him!

CAMILLA.

It has slumbered in my desk for over six years. That is what I ran back to the house for; I wanted this chance of giving it to you.

SIR RICHARD.

I must have left it behind me at Fauncourt when——

CAMILLA.

Yes.

[*She turns away and, leaning against the pence-box, looks out through the porch.*]

SIR RICHARD.

Bless me, here's the leaf still turned down! How every action comes back to one! There's nothing final in life—nothing final.

[*He is endeavouring to find the ribbon of his pince-nez, when, unperceived by him, a letter falls from between the pages of the book and lies on the ground at his feet. The music of the organ ends softly.*]

SIR RICHARD.

Of course—of course.

[Reading

“*Desine, dulcium*
“*Mater sæva Cupidinum*——”

CAMILLA.

“*Circa lustra decem*——”

SIR RICHARD.

You know it!

CAMILLA.

I learnt it afterwards.

SIR RICHARD.

[*Clasping the book.*] This is more than precious to me! It has been with you six years. To think of it—to think of it! [*He pauses, seeing she is still turning from him.*] Camilla! [*She comes to him, her expression is altered, her eyes full of tears. It is now twilight.*]

CAMILLA.

Oh, Richard, you have been so patient. I will try to be a good wife to you!

SIR RICHARD.

My dear!

MISS BRENT *enters with* LUCIAN *and* BEATRIX, *followed by* MRS. HODNUTT.

MISS BRENT.

[*Calling softly.*] Camilla! [*Approaching* PHILLITER.] The church is a little chilly, Richard. We are unwise in allowing Camilla to remain so long.

SIR RICHARD.

Ah, I'm very thoughtless.

MRS. HODNUTT.

[*Joining them.*] Sir Richard's kerridge 'ave come for him, ma'am—it's at the West Door. [LUCIAN gives his arm to MISS BRENT, and they all follow MRS. HODNUTT up the aisle.] Follow me, please—I'll save you all an ugly walk round the churchyard, that I will. Granny Hodnutt'll open the West Door for you, that she will! Follow Granny Hodnutt! [*In the distance.*] Jest a minute, my pretty ladies, while Granny Hodnutt unlocks the West Door. Blessin's on you, Sir Looshan, and you, your honour, if I may pass the compliment!

[PEDGRIFT comes up from the crypt laden with some pieces of brass.]

PEDGRIFT.

[*Listening.*] Gone. Gone—and not a scrap o' Latin out of him! [*There is a sound of bolting doors.*] Yah, nah, nah! [*He discovers the letter on the ground and picks it up with a grunt.*] Ugh! [*Holding the letter close to his eyes.*] Theer's writin' on it. Grange Party must ha' dropped that. [*Putting it in his pocket.*] I'll walk up to Grange wi' it arter tea. Ugh! [*Picking up his brasses.*] Who's that?

DENNIS HERON, a robust-looking man with hair turning grey, enters through the porch.

PEDGRIFT.

Maister Dennis.

DENNIS.

Thank goodness! [*Wringing PEDGRIFT's hand.*] It's Pedgrift!

PEDGRIFT.

Aye—not dead yet, Maister Dennis.

DENNIS

I'm so glad to see a familiar face.

PEDGRIFT.

[*Grimly.*] Were you wand'rin' about churchyard thinkin' to find old friends *theer*, Maister Dennis?

DENNIS.

I strolled into the churchyard, I—I'm killing time. I've come all the way from America, Pedgrift—arrived yesterday—got down this afternoon, and turned into the "George."

PEDGRIFT.

Ah, the "George" beaint the house it used to be, Maister Dennis.

DENNIS.

No. A new landlord, new faces indoors, new faces in the stables—not a soul knew me from Adam. But I've sent a note to Sir Lucian, telling him where I am, and I'm waiting for an answer. I know *he's* at the Grange—I heard his name mentioned at the station.

PEDGRIFT.

Aye, Sir Looshan's at Grange right enough.

DENNIS.

Have they—a full house at the Grange, Pedgrift?

PEDGRIFT.

Aye.

DENNIS.

Miss Anne Brent—and—Miss Beatrix?

PEDGRIFT.

Aye—they're theer.

DENNIS.

And—and Miss Camilla?

PEDGRIFT.

Aye.

DENNIS.

All—all well?

PEDGRIFT.

Aye—they be all wonderful surprisin' well.

DENNIS.

Ah! [*Looking about him.*] Flowers—*English* flowers. Harvest—eh? Pedgrift, why don't you talk to me! A good harvest?

PEDGRIFT.

Sodden wi' rain.

DENNIS.

Dear old Lydgate! [*To PEDGRIFT, who is collecting his brasses.*] What on earth have you got there?

PEDGRIFT.

Maister Dennis, you was a college gentleman, wasn't ye, eh?

DENNIS.

Ha! yes.

PEDGRIFT.

Theer's some durned Latin on my bits o' precious brasses. If I could 'cipher it I could piece 'em together.

DENNIS.

The Vicar——

PEDGRIFT.

I dursn't trust th' old Vicar, Maister Dennis; he'd rob me of all the credit, he would. If you'd lend me a 'elping 'and wi' the Latin——

DENNIS.

I ?

PEDGRIFT.

Come down into my cryp', Maister Dennis—I've got a lantern theer. [*Going to the head of the stair.*] Do 'ee come, Maister Dennis! Do 'ee come!

DENNIS.

[*Following him.*] I can't promise you much assistance, Pedgrift.

PEDGRIFT.

[*Descending slowly.*] Do 'ee best, Maister Dennis. Bless ye! bless ye!

DENNIS.

Be quick! I want to get back to the "George."

PEDGRIFT.

Guide yourself by wall, sir—that's right, that's right.

[*They descend the stair. As they disappear, MRS. HODNUTT enters. The faint light of the moon enters, and spreads itself over the church.*]

MRS. HODNUTT.

[*Calling.*] Pedgrift.

PEDGRIFT.

[*From below.*] Yah! nah! 'old 'ee tongue!

MRS. HODNUTT.

[*Calling.*] The keys are on the font. [*Placing the keys on the font.*] I am going home to my tea. [*There is a sound of knocking outside.*] Eh? That's somebody at the West Door. [*The knocking is repeated impatiently.*] Nay, I'll not open the West Door again to-night, whoever ye may be, that I'll promise ye. You must come the way round if ye've business at St. Eanswythe this night, and quick about it. Late enough for an old woman's tea, to be sure, to be sure!

CAMILLA *enters hurriedly, through the porch.*

CAMILLA.

Ah, Granny!

MRS. HODNUTT.

Miss Camilly!

CAMILLA.

Something has been lost—a letter. Have you seen it?

MRS. HODNUTT.

Not to my knowledge, Miss Camilly; though, to be sure——

CAMILLA.

[*Looking upon the ground.*] Granny, it must be found. It's an old letter—I placed it between the leaves of a book years ago, and this afternoon I hurriedly took the book from my desk and gave it to Sir Richard, here—just here.

MRS. HODNUTT.

Maybe Sir Richard's carryin' it about with him.

CAMILLA.

No—for, as I left the church, the thought of the letter came to me suddenly; it was no longer in the book. [*She goes up the aisle searching for the letter.*

MRS. HODNUTT.

Well, well, like enough I'll find it in the morning. Come, come, missy. I'll see ye home across the meadow.

CAMILLA.

No, thank you. I've told my brother; he is coming back to fetch me. [*Returning to the nave.*] I can't find it. Ah, it was written by a poor friend, who died. Suppose I never find it, dear Granny!

MRS. HODNUTT.

Now, don't 'ee, now! don't 'ee! There, there! Sit ye down a bit, and Granny Hodnutt 'll search in the West Porch.

[*She disappears up the aisle. It is now bright moonlight.*]

CAMILLA.

How *could* I have forgotten it! To have hoarded it for five years and then, in one minute of forgetfulness, to let it go from me! [*She sits by the font.*] It was a trust. "If he wanders back to England some day without me," poor Margaret said, "give it to him, with your own hands." And now, if ever he returns—if—ever— Oh, I mustn't think about that! No! God bless me and Richard! God bless me—and Richard!

[*DENNIS ascends the steps. He passes CAMILLA, not seeing her, and walks across towards the porch. She rises with a faint cry of fright, at which he turns sharply and faces her. They stand staring at each other silently.*]

CAMILLA.

[*In a frightened whisper.*] Dennis!

DENNIS.

Ah! [*Going to her with outstretched hands*] Camilla!
[*She stares at him, still frightened—then takes his hand for support.* MRS. HODNUTT
comes down the aisle.

CAMILLA.

You—you—frightened me. [*Faintly, stooping over his hand*] Ah! [*She droops, and he gently places her in a chair.*]

DENNIS.

Why, Granny Hodnutt!

MRS. HODNUTT.

Mr. Dennis! Ah, to be sure!

DENNIS.

I've been in the crypt with Pedgrift, burrowing among his brasses. Coming up rather silently, I fear I alarmed my cousin——

MRS. HODNUTT.

To be sure! to be sure!

CAMILLA.

[*Passing her hand over her eyes.*] Granny.

MRS. HODNUTT.

My deary?

CAMILLA.

I—I am very glad to see Mr. Dennis Heron. But I didn't expect to meet him—to-night—and I—was startled. Wait in the church, Granny, till my brother returns for me.

MRS. HODNUTT.

That I will, Miss Camilly. [*Going to the head of the stairs.*] I'll borrow the old man's lantern, sir, and you can chat quite cheerful and comfortable.

[*She descends.*]

CAMILLA.

Dennis.

DENNIS.

My dear cousin.

CAMILLA.

You cannot—have received—my letter.

DENNIS.

I've had no letter from you for many a day, Camilla.

CAMILLA.

I wrote—some weeks ago.

DENNIS.

It has missed me. And I wrote home—I mean, to you—just before starting. But, at this time o' year, I was sure you were in Switzerland. So that has missed you?

CAMILLA.

Yes. [*Faintly.*] I have not gone abroad this summer—because—— Ah!

DENNIS.

You are still trembling. I am so sorry.

[*She rises, commanding herself.*]

CAMILLA.

Why have you come back to England ?

DENNIS.

To see—my friends.

CAMILLA.

Is everything—well with you—in America ?

DENNIS.

Everything. I have prospered, Camilla—prospered beyond my furthest hope.

CAMILLA.

I am so thankful, Dennis.

DENNIS.

[*Gratefully.*] Ah !

CAMILLA.

Are those around you well—the two old people you have so generously cared for ?

DENNIS.

Well—well and happy.

CAMILLA.

Your father ?

DENNIS.

Why—strangely enough——

CAMILLA.

What is strange, Dennis ?

DENNIS.

Well, father has revealed capabilities we hardly suspected in England. The simple, rough people up-country were—rather—impressed by him.

CAMILLA.

Ah, Uncle Roderick !

DENNIS.

Now he's the leading spirit of a big mining concern, and is making money fast—and—he's not living with us now.

CAMILLA.

[*To herself.*] Poor Dennis ! And last—but first—your little girl ?

DENNIS.

She ! She's beautiful ! It's foolish of me to say that, perhaps, but—no, it isn't ! She's beautiful !

CAMILLA.

Dear, dear little Margaret ! That is her name ?

DENNIS.

Yes—her first name.

CAMILLA.

[*In a low voice.*] Her second ?

DENNIS.

Camilla.

MRS. HODNUTT.

[*Ascending the stairs.*] I'm coming, Mr. Dennis, and trouble enough to wean a light from Mr. Pedgrift. I've news for ye, Miss Camilly—Granny's got news for ye. [*Appearing with a lighted lantern and the lost letter.*] To think that th' old man should stand chattering here to you, sir, and all the time [*looking at the letter by the light of the lantern*] a letter, with Mr. Dennis Heron's name on it, in his coat-pocket.

CAMILLA.

Ah !

DENNIS.

My name ?

MRS. HODNUTT.

To be sure ! [*To CAMILLA.*] It's Pedgrift as found the letter, 'alf a blind man as he is.

CAMILLA.

[*Looking at the letter, hesitatingly, without taking it.*] Give it to Mr. Dennis, Granny.

MRS. HODNUTT.

[*Handing the letter to DENNIS, with a curtsey.*] To be sure I will, Miss Camilly. [*Depositing the lantern on the font.*] There's a light, sir and missy. [*Going up the aisle.*] Call Granny if it needs snuffing. Granny's within call.

[*She disappears. The moonlight is gradually diminishing.*]

DENNIS.

[*Looking at the letter by the lantern light.*] Margaret ! [*Turning to CAMILLA.*] Meg !

CAMILLA.

Poor Meg gave me that, Dennis, on the morning I sat with her in Westminster—the morning—she——

DENNIS.

Yes.

CAMILLA.

She believed she was not to live, and begged me to keep that letter by me until you came back to England alone—and then I was to give it to you with my own hands.

DENNIS.

Ah, then——!

[He offers the letter to CAMILLA, who takes it.]

CAMILLA.

It's a kind word from her, she said, that she dearly wanted to reach you through me. For five years it has lain between the leaves of a book; bringing the book into the church, the letter fell from it, here. And now, we do meet—for the first time since that day—and—*[returning the letter]*—I give it you with my own hands.

[He takes the letter, with his head bowed, and she walks away from him. He opens the letter and reads it by the light of the lantern.]

DENNIS.

[Reading to himself.] “Dennis. Something tells me that, if you lose me, you and Miss Camilla Brent will meet again, and—marry. She's the lady whose place I took, and it's only natural, and I've taught myself to think of it without feeling wretched. So I want you to be sure that no shadow of mine comes between you, and that I—wish it.” *[Rousing himself and turning to CAMILLA.]* Camilla. *[As she comes to him, he gives her the letter.]* It's for you, as well as for me—she meant it.

[She sits by the side of the font reading under the light of the lantern. He leaves her till she has read the letter. Then she hides her eyes with her hand, and he returns and stands before her with his hands clasped.]

DENNIS.

[*In a whisper.*] Camilla. [*She gives a little sob.*]
Let it be so—let it be so.

[*She removes her hand from her eyes and sits staring at him.*

CAMILLA.

Dennis!

DENNIS.

My motherless girl laughs and plays alone in my home—the one young life near me—but every child-like sound seems to beg that she may know a living mother. And I—I am solitary. I've come back to England thinking to discharge a debt. Be Lady Bountiful to me still, and take the remaining years of my life for it—the thought, the care, the service of my life!

CAMILLA.

[*Rising and facing him, like a woman in a dream.*]
Dennis. Dennis—Heron. You—don't—know? No one has—told you?

DENNIS.

What?

[*She looks round the church, he following her gaze.*

CAMILLA.

These flowers—placed here by the school-children.

DENNIS.

Why?

CAMILLA.

The—the marriage.

DENNIS.

Marriage ?

CAMILLA.

To-morrow—to-morrow. [*She stands trembling, with her hands tightly clasped and her eyes down.*] Richard's long friendship—growing out of that—into affection—years ago. His—untiring—solicitude—his—deep—devotion—the prospect of a useful—calm—good—life ! My aunt—her dearest wish ! To-morrow—to-morrow—to-morrow.

DENNIS.

Oh, forgive me—forgive me !

CAMILLA.

Yes. You did not know. Yes.

DENNIS.

Ah, may God bless you and your husband, Camilla ! To this church, where you and I have knelt together, I come back to worship once more by your side ; and my prayer is—God bless you and your husband !

CAMILLA.

That is right—and good. Everything else we will forget. [*Returning him the letter.*] Poor Margaret !

[*He places the letter reverently in the breast of his coat.*]

CAMILLA.

Mind, there are some things to forget ! [*Looking at him steadily.*] Dennis—forget !

DENNIS.

Yes. Forget!

[LUCIAN'S voice is heard in the distance.

LUCIAN.

[*Calling.*] Camilla! Cam! Cam! Are you there?

DENNIS.

[*Calling.*] Holloa! Lucian!

[CAMILLA goes up the aisle.

LUCIAN.

[*Nearer.*] Dennis! [*Entering quickly and seizing DENNIS by the shoulders.*] My dear old chap! My dear fellow! After all these years! Jolly, eh? Jolly?

DENNIS.

Lucian.

LUCIAN.

Your scribble was waiting for me when I got home, and I took the "George" on my way here. My dear old chap! You've found Cam.

DENNIS.

Yes—I strolled into the church——

LUCIAN.

So you know all our news—about to-morrow?

DENNIS.

Yes, yes—yes, yes.

LUCIAN.

You'll be my guest, Dennis. I've sent a man to the "George" to fetch your baggage. The Grange is your home here, you know.

DENNIS.

Ah, Lucian—— !

LUCIAN.

[*To CAMILLA.*] Cam! [*CAMILLA comes and takes LUCIAN's arm.*] St. Eanswythe is not very inspiriting at this hour. What fancies you have! [*Going towards the porch.*] Come along, Dennis!

DENNIS.

Go on—I—I'll follow you. I must go back into the village.

LUCIAN.

What a fellow you are! [*In the porch.*] Ugh! cold and cloudy! [*He disappears, with CAMILLA, his voice getting gradually distant.*] Be quick, Dennis! Dine at eight! No ladies to-night. Ha, ha, ha! Men—gossip—smoke—good health to Richard—old times! Dear old Dennis! Dear old Dennis!

[*As LUCIAN's voice dies away DENNIS sinks into a chair burying his head in his hands. After a moment's stillness, there comes the faint sound of a peal of church bells a long way off. MRS. HODNUTT comes down the aisle and at the same moment PEDGRIFT ascends the crypt stairs.*]

MRS. HODNUTT.

[*Seeing DENNIS—to herself.*] Ah, deary me! To be sure, to be sure! [*Aside to PEDGRIFT—pointing to DENNIS.*] Samuel Pedgrift, look 'ee there!

[*They stand watching DENNIS for a moment silently.*]

PEDGRIFT.

[*Grimly.*] Ah! You 'old 'ee tongue. Mrs. Hodnutt!

[*He closes and locks the crypt door.*]

DENNIS.

[*Looking up at them and rising.*] What bells are those?

PEDGRIFT.

St. Paul's at Baverstoke—Sir Richard's own parish. They're beginnin' their rejicin's hover night—we don't ring here till marnin'.

DENNIS.

Ah! [*Nodding to PEDGRIFT and MRS. HODNUTT.*] Good night.

PEDGRIFT AND MRS. HODNUTT.

Good night to ye, Mr. Dennis.

MRS. HODNUTT.

Shall we see your kind face at the weddin', sir?

DENNIS.

Yes. Good night.

[*He walks out through the porch, MRS. HODNUTT and PEDGRIFT slowly following. Then there is the sound of the shutting of a heavy door and the grating of a lock. The curtain falls.*]

After a few moments the curtain rises, showing the church in bright sunlight. The pews are occupied by village folk and the tradespeople, a soldier, a

policeman, grooms and other servants. In front of the pews are some children carrying nosegays. Other village folk and ladies and gentlemen are coming in, and MRS. HODNUTT is fussily directing them to their places. The wedding party is assembled—SIR RICHARD, his best man and some guests in one group, MISS BRENT, BEATRIX, dressed as a bridesmaid, together with the rest of the bridesmaids, in another. MISS BRENT is greeting guests as they arrive. Some children carrying flowers are waiting in the porch; PEDGRIFF and two villagers are pulling the bell-ropes. The clergymen can just be seen through a small arched opening.

A MAN.

[*Turning to a woman in front of him.*] The sun shines on her marryin', if that be owt of a good sign.

A WOMAN.

Aye, they be rich folk—'twere rainin' and blowy when I were wed. Lordsakes! here's Gran'fer Pilbeam!

[*A very old man is led in through the porch by a little girl. MRS. HODNUTT beckons him angrily, then assists him into the man's place, who makes way for him. DENNIS comes down the aisle, and stands by the font, talking to a gentleman.*

A WOMAN.

Look 'ee theer! Theer's young Heron.

A MAN.

Young Heron!

A WOMAN.

Back t' Iydgate, grey-haired.

A MAN.

Aye. He were Miss Camilly's fancy once't, they do declare.

A WOMAN.

She's well saved. Why, he went rakey and ruined his own feyther—that be known for true.

[The organ is played, there is a general movement of expectation. A little girl runs in to speak to the bridesmaids, who go out excitedly through the porch.]

A MAN.

She's comin'!

A WOMAN.

She beaint!

A MAN.

I tell 'ee she's comin'! *[Looking across.]* Eh, but she's sorry lookin'. When my gel were wed she were flamin' red i' th' face.

A WOMAN.

Thy gel wedded a lad. Sir Richard be a elderly man, and theer's now't to be 'shamed at.

[CAMILLA and LUCIAN enter through the porch, she leaning upon his arm. BEATRIX and the other bridesmaids follow. The porch is then filled up by the children and some footmen wearing wedding favours. As CAMILLA passes DENNIS, who is standing

by the font, she looks at him momentarily. SIR RICHARD advances to meet CAMILLA, they stand at the chancel rails, the rest taking their proper positions. PEDGRIFT and his men cease their bell-ringing and the organ stops. There is a moment of silence, then CAMILLA totters back with her hand to her brow.

CAMILLA.

[Almost inaudibly.] Dennis!

[She sinks into a chair by the font, with her head bowed and her hands covering her face. There is a movement of consternation from all, then complete stillness.

MISS BRENT.

[Coming to CAMILLA'S side.] Camilla!

[CAMILLA does not stir.

SIR RICHARD.

[Slowly approaching MISS BRENT and touching her arm.] Anne. [She turns to him.] There shall be no marriage to-day. I think I know—I think I know!

THE END.

16 *ms*



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